



SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE GUIDE

# HBR Guide to

# Networking

**Branch out**  
**Give and receive**  
**Make smart connections**



# HBR Guide to **Networking**

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# HBR Guide to **Networking**

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## What You'll Learn

Hate the idea of schmoozing and glad-handing to succeed? Most of us feel that way.

But you don't have to be slick and indiscriminate to create and sustain a strong network. In fact, you're much better off being yourself and connecting selectively—that's how you'll build relationships with real value. You'll get your ideas off the ground, draw on others' expertise, scope out business opportunities, and land coveted roles.

This guide will give you the tools and confidence you need to network effectively—so you can move ahead and reach your goals.

You'll get better at:

- Creating the *right* ties
- Maintaining them in a way that feels authentic
- Nourishing relationships through give-and-take
- Sharing—and spreading—ideas
- Tapping mentors for support and expertise

### **What You'll Learn**

- Using social media tools to network
- Pitching yourself
- Managing your image online
- Reaching out after losing touch

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Section 1

# **What Networking Will Do for You**

# Chapter 1

# Target—and Energize—Your Network

**by Rob Cross and Robert J. Thomas**

Networks matter. You know this from personal experience. You've seen colleagues use connections to achieve their goals, move up the ranks, and sometimes even advance beyond their abilities. And research confirms what you've observed: Over the past several decades, studies have linked networking with stronger performance at work, higher compensation, rapid promotion, and the ability to find a job.

Yet, if you're like most of us, you struggle with networking. Perhaps you chalk it up to a lack of luck or natural ability because it feels artificial when you try to do it. Or maybe you find it hard to justify spending time developing a network that will help you "someday" when today is busy enough.

## What Networking Will Do for You

Even if you recognize that networking is a skill you can and must cultivate, it's hard to get started if you don't know what effective networks look like or how successful people build them. So an entire self-help industry has come to the rescue with advice, but much of it leads us in the wrong direction: Too often we're told that a good network is a big one. Authors study people with enormous contact lists, countless Facebook friends, and a huge Twitter following—and then offer counsel on how we can all be like those magical networkers. Unfortunately, that approach fails us in two important ways.

First, it runs counter to how most of us want to live. We cringe at the thought of creating all those surface-level relationships. We detest the schmoozing, shameless self-promotion, and political maneuvering it takes to stockpile contacts in our arsenal.

Second, research shows that simply focusing on volume will *hurt* your career. An enormous network is overwhelming to maintain and often filled with people whose interests and abilities mirror your own. If the people you interact with frequently are also connected with (and similar to) one another, you risk becoming heavily biased in your thinking and decision making. That kind of insularity can short-circuit an otherwise promising career, because you're devoting time to building and maintaining a network that doesn't yield the new opportunities or insights that more-diverse networks do.

The highest-performing networkers—those who get things done and move ahead—build fewer but higher-quality connections with different types of people. They reach out to others before they have to and rapidly move

past superficial conversation. When they connect, they listen, focus on others' needs, and share information, resources, and contacts without expecting an immediate return. Even early in a relationship, they find ways to be useful and make it clear that they're trustworthy.

Perhaps most important, they develop targeted relationships that extend their abilities by bridging important subgroups within and outside their organizations. If you're in investment banking, for example, you might forge connections with experts on fixed-income products and derivatives—and as a result come up with creative, more comprehensive ways to serve your clients. Those relationships can also help you grow personally, give you a broader knowledge base, and extend your influence.

The ties that matter the most will:

- **Connect you to people at various levels.** A good network knows no hierarchical bounds. Higher-ups can help you make better decisions, acquire resources, develop political awareness, and find out what's happening at the top of the organization. Peers can brainstorm with you and share information. People further down the org chart may provide technical expertise or give you front-line intelligence. For example, a consultant in the consumer products industry who has ties that span the hierarchy becomes much more effective at helping her clients solve complex strategic and organizational-design problems and at navigating her own firm's politics to get plans executed. Good ideas are just the first step to success in an

## What Networking Will Do for You

organization. Connecting with people at different levels helps you build a coalition of support among decision makers and the folks charged with implementing your ideas.

- **Reach across functions and organizations.** Collaborative relationships with people in other units and companies will expose you to information you need to do your job well. Suppose you're a software engineer. If you seek input from customer service colleagues, you can create products that better suit users' needs. And by exchanging ideas with other software engineers outside your organization—at association meetings, for example—you'll benefit from a broader range of perspectives and best practices. And you'll arrive at answers faster than you would on your own.
- **Facilitate your career growth.** You can also tap your network to learn and advance. By gathering developmental feedback from people at all levels and obtaining their personal and political support, you'll increase your own productivity and engagement, and feel an even greater sense of purpose in your work.

How do you create and maintain those kinds of ties? With energy and enthusiasm. Bring those qualities to your interactions with others, and you'll improve your chances of becoming and remaining a high performer. In fact, being an “energizer” is four times more likely to help you succeed than being at the very center of your net-

work. Why? Because energizers create “pull”—so the best ideas, resources, and talent come their way. We know this intuitively. All of us have gone the extra mile on a project for people who got us enthused about their work. They do this throughout their entire networks and reap rewards: Others keep bringing them opportunities, support, and greater effort.

You don’t need to be an extrovert. You can become an energizer in your network—even if you’re low-key or averse to schmoozing—by doing the following:

- **Actively engage in conversations with your contacts.** Bring yourself fully to every interaction. Signal interest by sitting forward and asking questions. Stifle distractions such as e-mail and phone calls—put away your mobile device when you get together to talk. People notice if you’re “present,” and they’ll respond to your ideas and engagement with their own.
- **Do what you say you will.** People will invest more in their relationships with you if you follow through on your commitments. If you’ve promised to write up a section of a report, do it—and maybe go a step further and show how your work reinforces others’. People will learn that they can count on you to bring your best to their projects, and you’ll get greater effort from them when you need their help.
- **Make constructive suggestions.** Members of your network will get excited by realistic and attainable

## What Networking Will Do for You

possibilities. Avoid shutting down their enthusiasm by focusing too much (or too soon) on potential obstacles. And when you're working together to solve problems, pay attention to what they care about. Leaders often lose energy in their networks by concentrating on their own concerns, such as budget constraints, and don't elicit the cooperation they could get by speaking to others' needs. Say you're a tech director lobbying to bring a big infrastructure project in-house rather than farm it out to a contractor. Explain how the move will help stakeholders develop key capabilities within their ranks, not just how it will rein in IT costs.

- **Seek input.** Your colleagues and friends in other organizations want to be a part of meaningful endeavors—so when you've got something exciting cooking, let them in on it. They'll be more forthcoming with their own ideas and resources if you draw them into stimulating conversations and projects.
- **Focus on issues, not individuals, in disagreements.** Because energizers are highly engaged, they're quick to speak up when they disagree. But they're careful to critique ideas, not the people who suggest them.

Chances are you're already doing many of these things. But the most effective networkers do them consciously and consistently—even under stress and time pressure. This guide will help you sharpen these skills and exercise

them more fully in your day-to-day work. And then targeted, energized networking will feel more natural and its rewards, more palpable.

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## Chapter 2

# Weave Your Own Web of Influence

by **Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback**

Organizations by their natures are political environments. To succeed in them, you must acquire influence. You do this by proactively creating a network of personal contacts—your own web of interdependence—and then using it to exchange the support, resources, and information you and your network partners need.

The wisdom of a network may seem obvious, but creating one is something many professionals dread, and so few do it actively or well. Do you? Learning to do it—indeed, being *willing* to do it and then actually creating a network—will be a significant milestone on your journey.

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Adapted from *Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader* (product #12285), by Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback, Harvard Business Review Press, 2011

## Have You Created a Real Network of Your Own?

Everyone builds relationships in the course of doing their work. So you already have a set of contacts. What's needed, though, is not merely contacts but a network: a set of ongoing, enduring relationships with those whom you depend on and who depend on you, based on a real understanding of each other's needs and mutual dependencies.

How is this network different from the haphazard contacts that you and all professionals create in the course of doing your work?

- It's likely to be *bigger and more complete*, since it should include everyone you need and everyone who needs you.
- It's composed of *ongoing partnerships* with network members rather than one-off contacts made only when needed.
- It is *both present- and future-oriented* since it includes those you need to accomplish the daily work *and* those whose support will be critical in the future.
- It's essential to create such relationships *before* you need them. If you connect only when you must resolve a problem, you'll be interacting only at times of pressure and even conflict—not the best way to begin or sustain a fruitful relationship.

Even in a network of ongoing relationships built around long-term mutual benefit, there can still be dif-

ferences, even tension and conflict. But they will occur in a context of underlying trust, understanding, and partnership that has already been established.

Effective professionals use their networks to pursue plans and goals in three key ways.

***Do you use your network to obtain and provide information?***

From network members, you will gain (and provide to them) the information that helps your and their groups succeed. Through members, you can scan the environment—ask questions, listen, observe—for not only what’s happening but what might happen as well. Much of it will be tidbits, gossip, details, and assumptions you assemble into a coherent picture, impossible to create any other way, that becomes your foundation for better-informed decisions and plans.

Information isn’t available for the asking. Because it truly is power, people often hoard it, releasing it only to those they know and trust. And even if you do hear something useful, but you don’t know the people providing it, you cannot evaluate what they say or interpret its implications.

***Do you use your network to link the work of your group and the rest of the organization?***

This is the role of *integrating* your group and the wider firm. Here you troubleshoot problems; speak for, protect, and promote your group; and obtain the resources it needs. A rich network is key to performing this role well.

***Do you use your network to form coalitions of those who seek the same goals?***

A *coalition* is a collection of people who align themselves in pursuit of a common goal—a new strategy, a new product, a different way of doing business. It's a case of strength in numbers, a way of mobilizing support and negotiating from a position of greater influence. Few organizations decide issues by vote, but every senior leader understands the risks of acting in opposition to many voices speaking in unison.

**Build Three Networks**

Ultimately, you need to create three related but different networks.

- Your *operational network* comprises those involved in your group's daily work.
- Your *strategic network* will consist of those who help you prepare for the future by answering the questions, "What should we be doing? Where are we going, and how will we get there?"
- Your *developmental network* includes those who help you grow and provide personal, emotional support when you need it. It can overlap with the others to some extent, but it's also likely to have several unique members, given its personal nature and purpose.

You may be thinking, "That's all great—for someone else. I know it's important, but it's not me! I like people, but I'm not good at meeting and greeting. It's like going to a party where I don't know anybody, and I hate that!"

We understand. Building a network certainly takes effort, but we don't agree that you must be an extrovert to do it. Why? Because you already have a preexisting reason—your mutual dependence—to approach all who will be in the networks you build. Everyone in them is already connected to you and you to them through your present or future work. You depend on them, and they on you. Create your relationships by identifying and building on those preexisting ties.

Given this mutual dependence, networking doesn't require a particularly outgoing personality. It's a skill, something anyone can learn through practice. Once you start doing it, you may even enjoy it.

In fact, if you're naturally gregarious, you will face your own trap: creating a network that takes on a life of its own. Like organizations, your network is instrumental and exists to serve a purpose. What you do must be driven primarily by the demands of the work, not by the personal relationships created along the way. Balancing the personal obligations a network can create with the needs of your work can present challenges you must resolve.

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Section 2  
**How to  
Network  
Effectively**

# Chapter 3

# Your Networking Regimen

by **Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback**

There are five major steps in building a productive network.

1. Know your business and organization.
2. Know where your group is going.
3. Map your web.
4. Create your network.
5. Sustain your network.

We don't mean for these steps to be performed mechanically. We present them this way because we know from experience that if professionals don't approach this impor-

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tant task systematically, they probably won't do it or do it to the extent necessary. Think of the steps as a regimen, like an exercise program, that you follow with discipline.

## **Step 1: Know Your Business and Organization**

Start by creating a solid foundation of knowledge about the business you're in. This is the context for everything that follows. Nothing will make sense until you understand what the organization does, how it works, the challenges it faces, where it's trying to go, how it's planning to get there, and who does what.

Organizational conflict usually reflects competing *legitimate* interests—that is, points of view and issues driven by the business's challenges, goals, and strategies and the way those affect each group differently. Understand the business to understand those differences.

### ***Understand your business***

Start at the level of the business (or business unit) as a whole. Look at internal sources of information and what's available online from analysts, business publications, government or regulatory sources, and blogs. Attend trade and professional meetings. You want to know the company's longer-term goals, strategies, business model, and plans. You also need to understand its history, especially the recent past, and the issues, challenges, and threats it currently faces.

Understand, too, how the market it's in operates. See it through the eyes of its stakeholders: customers, investors, and suppliers. Learn what market forces shape its industry. Get to know the competition.

***Understand how your organization actually works***

Now look at the various divisions, departments, and other groups inside the organization—what they do and how they work together. In particular, make sure you understand the role of your division or department and how your group fits into it.

***Figure out who has influence in your organization***

Determine how influence is actually distributed throughout your organization. What is the *informal* organization chart? The opinions of people and groups with influence carry greater weight when important decisions are made. These are the folks you want on your side. Pay attention to certain clues:

**Who has formal authority?** Start with a person's or group's status in the hierarchy. Formal authority is far from the only source of influence, but it is a factor.

**Who is listened to and why?** In meetings and other settings, identify the individuals and groups whose voices command more attention. Whom do people in the organization talk about more? Whose opinions seem to carry more weight?

**Whose work is important to organizational objectives?** Some people or units play larger roles in relation to the organization's goals. If the company expects most of its growth to come from Asian markets, those connected to that effort will be more influential than those linked to the West European market where sales and profits are flat.

**Who's "plugged in"?** Personal ties are important. A CFO may be only one of several senior managers, but his personal working relationship with the CEO may give him more influence than his peers. In the same way, being part of a key network imparts influence. The head of the West European division wields influence, in spite of flat sales in her market, because she sits on the company's management committee and has daily contact with other senior managers. This is one reason serving on task forces can be useful.

**Who has critical expertise?** The vice president of information technology may be especially important to a CEO who considers himself weak in technical matters.

## **Step 2: Know Your Current Work and Where You're Going**

Perhaps it's obvious, but to map your web you must begin with a good understanding of your group and its work. What does it do, and how does it do its work? What are its critical success factors? Its key metrics—measures that define progress and success? Whom does it depend on? Who depends on it?

Equally important, you must know where your group is going. What are your plans? Where do you expect to be in a year? In three or more years? How will the future be different from today? How do you plan to get there? What will change along the way? What resources and whose help and support will you need to create the future you want?

### Step 3: Map Your Web

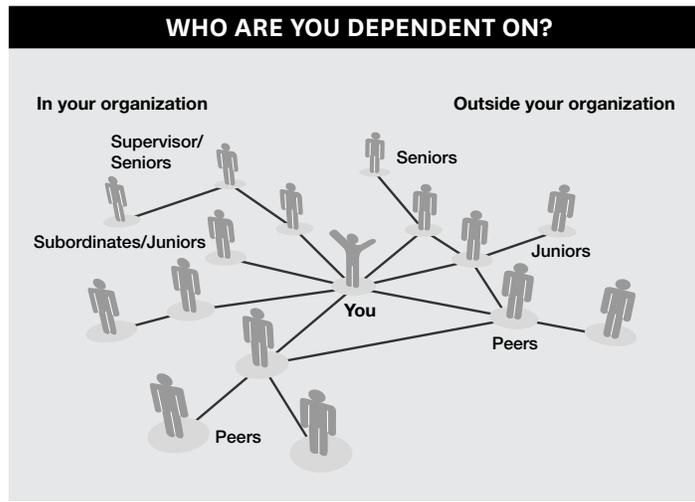
Now you're ready to name the people and groups who should be part of your networks. (See the figure below.)

#### *Identify who should be in your networks*

Given today's *and* tomorrow's needs, identify all the people and groups you and your people need or that need you. Ask yourself:

- Whom do I and my group depend on now, and who depends on us? (Your operational network)
- Whom will we depend on, and who will depend on us in the future? (Your strategic network)

**Write down these names!** Make two lists, one operational and the other strategic. (For another approach to mapping your network, see "How to Build Your Network," later in this guide.)



## How to Network Effectively

Beside each name, note the nature of the relationship: how are you dependent on that person or group, and how is that person or group dependent on you?

Watch out for common traps or mistakes as you make your list:

**Don't focus just on people you see and work with daily.** If your networks don't extend beyond the location where you work or the people you see often, if they don't anticipate future needs, you almost certainly aren't reaching far enough.

**Seek diversity over sheer size.** You want bridges to parts of your work world you don't normally inhabit. This will give you access to a broader range of talent, ideas, and resources.

**Include adversaries or competitors.** Don't exclude people or groups because they may have opposed or failed to support you in the past. If you need them, or they need you, add them to your list.

**Don't forget outside dependencies.** Have you included everyone you need outside the organization? Key vendors, customers, consultants, freelancers, government or trade groups, other services?

### ***Assess those on your list***

*First*, for each person on your list, ask, *How important is this contact to my group?* Rank each on a simple scale of 1–3, where 1 means “important,” 2 means “more important,” and 3 means “very important.”

*Second*, assess the *current quality of the relationship*. Are there mutual trust, expectations, and a willingness to work together, even on difficult problems? Again, use a simple number scale, where 1 means “could be stronger or more positive,” 2 means “not necessarily perfect but a generally good current relationship,” and 3 means “very strong and positive.” Note that a 1 has two possible meanings: no relationship currently exists, or it exists but is very weak or problematic. Perhaps a recent dispute left a bitter memory and there’s some mending to be done. In assessing relationships, look at them not just through your eyes but through the eyes of the other side as well.

*Third*, compare the two rankings. Are there relationships rated 2 or 3 in importance but only 1 in current quality? Those are important disparities to address. In the long run, you want every relationship to be 2 or 3 in quality, with all important relationships a 3.

This simple analysis can be very revealing. How many relationships did you mark 1 because you really have no relationship yet? If many fall into this category, it’s an indication of the new networks you need to establish.

Look, too, at the relationships you marked 1 that already exist but are strained. If you have several, ask yourself whether there are common reasons for the problems. This may shed light on how you’re perceived or the way you deal with colleagues.

## **Step 4: Create Your Network**

Here is where you begin to create the actual relationships that make up your network.

***Make contact with network members***

To begin, systematically work through the list of people you identified. Contact each, note how you're dependent on one another, explain that you want to discuss ways of working together better and helping each other, and, if possible, arrange a face-to-face meeting or a video call.

For many professionals, this is the hard part: initiating contact in the absence of an immediate problem or some other compelling reason. Be opportunistic. Attend functions or meetings where you're likely to find people on your list. Consider joining task forces because they're good ways to make connections. Invite contacts to join your network via social networking tools; ask to receive their blogs or RSS feeds, if they offer them. (RSS, or "really simple syndication," refers to software that makes it easy to keep track of blogs that interest you.) Or offer yours to them.

Establish both a professional and a human connection. You want an ongoing relationship based on mutual dependence and trust, but nothing will really happen between the two of you until you connect as humans. If you observe effective networkers, you're likely to see that their interactions include humor and such nonwork matters as family, sports, personal interests, and background. (But be careful of humor; it often falls flat and can even be inadvertently offensive when used across cultural lines.)

As you make these contacts, learn something of the person's culture and what that culture expects of a work relationship. In many cultures, there are certain proprieties to observe, such as the need for socializing before discussing anything to do with work, or not asking

personal questions early in a relationship—for example, questions about family or children. Other cultures are so task driven—people get together to perform a task, and the relationship ends when the job is done—that people you contact may want some specific work reason to get together. So be prepared with a shared goal, work process, or some other common issue to explore. Then use that discussion to begin a broader conversation.

In the beginning, you may find some individuals slow to reply to e-mails or phone messages. Keep at it in a professional way. Get on their calendars, even if the earliest available time is two months away. Above all, don't wait for a problem to arise. Remember, as you make these contacts, you're dealing with busy people. Provide as compelling a rationale for meeting as you can. Recognize that if you're not the solution to an immediate problem, *you must provide the energy that gets the relationship started.*

Connect, too, with people who've opposed or competed with you in the past. Instead of ascribing their previous positions to unpleasant personality flaws ("They're jerks, stupid, ignorant, self-interested . . ."), try to understand what underlying business issues or interests motivated them. Approach them by saying you want to understand your differences and find ways to work together more productively. Be prepared to take some heat before moving on to create a better relationship.

All the while, be yourself and use your own style of interaction. If you tend to be naturally shy or socially reactive, you do need to be proactive, but otherwise you needn't become a different person. Put together a plan

for contacting the people on your network list, and then work the plan systematically. It may help to observe others who do relationship building well. Don't just mimic their style mechanically. That seldom works, because you're not them. But you can pick up insights and approaches for your own use.

All this will become easier as your network and knowledge grow. The more contacts you have, the more you can make through referrals. Your ability to link people and ideas, along with your organizational insights, will make you an increasingly valuable person to know.

### ***Use current members to extend your network***

As you build your network, ask members whether they know others you should add. You're particularly looking for connections or ties that will extend your world and provide access to useful information and insights not available through those in your workaday world.

### ***Don't put off your strategic network***

Once you and your group have a plan, you can begin creating a network to achieve your longer-term goals. Building this network will require even more discipline because its real benefits may only come in the future. Start with those in your operational network who are also important to you strategically. Branch out from there to include those who are less important now but will become important in the future. Be proactive and opportunistic—use everyday activities, such as a meeting or presentation or an encounter in the cafeteria, to approach or recon-

nect with others. However you approach them, be clear about your plans and how you may be working together in the future.

### ***Your attitude is important***

Take care to approach network building with the right mind-set because the underlying spirit you bring to it will shape everything you do. If you are driven entirely by your own needs—How can *I* get what *I* want?—it will be obvious to others, no matter how well you think you're camouflaging your fundamental self-interest. It's the nature of networking that to get what you want, you must give others what they need. So understanding others and their needs is important. Ask questions: What's your goal, and how are you planning to get there? What are your top three priorities? What's the biggest obstacle you face? How can we help?

## **Step 5: Sustain Your Network**

Your network will wither and die unless you sustain it by using it as often as you can.

**Share—don't hoard—information**, point out threats and opportunities, send a heads-up about something of interest, volunteer to help with a problem, actively support others' causes when you can, contribute ideas, give honest and constructive feedback. If you know someone is interested in a subject and you find a good article or podcast that applies, forward it to him.

**Be a bridge yourself.** Act as a link between two members of your network who share some work interest but wouldn't normally connect with each other in the normal course of events.

**Build coalitions** of network members who seek a similar goal. Work through your common interests, and find ways to express your single voice where it can influence the actions and decisions of others.

**Take opportunities to make a human connection.** Send e-mails saying, "Thanks," "Congratulations," "I'm sorry for you," or whatever is appropriate and genuine. The test here isn't whether you normally do that sort of thing; instead, ask yourself, "What would I say if the person were standing in front of me?" Say it in a quick call or e-mail. Small, human touches are important. (See the sidebar, "Nurturing Your Network," for more ideas on sustaining connections without adding stress.)

**Periodically step back and assess your relationships** with your network partners, as you did in the beginning. Are important relationships being ignored or underserved? Do any need to be repaired or revived?

**Use all interactions to maintain and strengthen your long-term relationships** with network members, not just to resolve an immediate problem. Conduct negotiations, no matter how tough, on the assumption that both of you want to maintain a strong ongoing connection.

**Talk as candidly as possible about your relationship** and how it's working for each of you. Be prepared to hear, without defensiveness, problems they have with you and your group. Be willing to admit errors and misjudgments. The words *I'm sorry* or *I was wrong—I need to learn* may seem trite by themselves. At the right moment, though, they can be transformational.

**Avoid unhealthy rivalry.** Many professionals tend to see relationships as opportunities for competition. Some of that can be constructive, especially if aimed at achieving mutual goals. But take care that interactions with others don't become primarily about winning. Too often, we fall into an "us versus them" attitude. Instead, find ways everyone can achieve their goals, at least in the long run.

## **Forming and Using Networks Takes Time and Effort**

We recognize that many features of work and the workplace today make it difficult to devote the time needed to build and maintain networks.

In a task-focused culture, it's hard to find time for what many professionals, whose responsibilities are constantly growing, consider socializing or politicking. Even if you recognize its importance, time for something that, at the moment, rarely feels urgent can be limited.

Organizational and workplace features make networking difficult, too. The rapid formation and dissolution of task teams, fast-changing organizational structures, a constantly shifting marketplace, and the need to

## NURTURING YOUR NETWORK

by Jane Heifetz

Building an effective network requires discipline, but it needn't take too much time—little things go a long way:

- Provide support during career transitions or other professional challenges. Forward relevant blog posts and articles. Invite a colleague out to lunch to discuss her struggles.
- Offer to help people prepare for presentations. Give feedback on slides or rehearsals.
- Help others recruit for open positions they're trying to fill. Offer to share job descriptions with members of your external network, look at résumés, discuss promising candidates, or be a second-round interviewer.
- Celebrate birthdays or professional accomplishments. Serve cake and a sparkly beverage at your next team meeting.
- Introduce your closest colleagues to one another. They'll feel more comfortable reconnecting in the future, when they need fresh perspectives on a snarly problem.
- Engage on a personal level. For instance, express interest in colleagues' families or outside activities. And welcome them back from vacations by leaving handwritten notes on their desks.

- Help their family members with career development. Offer to edit résumés and cover letters or provide coaching on the interview process.
- Support people battling stress or other health issues. Invite them out for occasional lunchtime walks or yoga classes.
- Share vacation ideas. Pass along brochures, maps, or hotel and restaurant recommendations.

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deal with distant colleagues make it unclear who should be in your network.

No wonder we tend to form haphazard networks focused on today's problems.

In spite of these difficulties and negative predispositions, effective professionals create the kinds of networks we're describing.

How do they find the time? Here are some guidelines in the form of questions.

### ***Do you build networking into your daily work?***

Effective professionals use their daily work and interactions to make and build relationships. They're opportunistic. They place themselves in positions, like meetings with outside groups, that allow such contacts. They build networks through hundreds of little steps fitted into their

schedules. Not all of it can be done this way, of course, but more than you might think, particularly after you've identified those you want in your networks.

***Do you understand the power of weak ties?***

Professionals adept at creating networks recognize that not all connections need to be close and deep. If you spend most of your time building such ties, your world will be limited to those you work with regularly, and you will miss the opportunities of a diverse network that includes what are called “weak” ties.

*Weak ties* are network relationships with individuals who are usually on the periphery of your daily work that connect you with worlds different from your own and extend your reach to provide access to unique information and other resources. A key virtue of weaker ties is that they require less effort to maintain and demand less reciprocity.

Thus, the relationships in your network should include a core of strong ties surrounded by many diverse weak ties. Because they extend your reach, weak ties are especially useful for scanning the environment inside and outside your organization to identify coming challenges and opportunities. You can use them to solve problems, gather information, and find new ideas. On the other hand, strong ties are important for doing actual work and for the coalition building often needed to implement new ideas.

***Do you use software tools that facilitate networking and collaboration?***

Social networking and similar software can make networking much easier. We strongly suggest that you in-

## Your Networking Regimen

investigate tools on the web or within your company. Wikis and other collaboration platforms are useful for building and maintaining strong ties. Social networking sites can help maintain weak ties. They make the maintenance of contacts and the exchange of updates easier. Blogging or the creation of wikis can be useful ways to seek information, involve others in ongoing discussions around issues of mutual interest, and collaboratively develop documents, such as plans, spreadsheets, and presentations. These tools are almost essential for a network or team spread over many locations.

Encourage your firm to make such tools available. They will significantly extend your ability to network while reducing the time required.

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# Chapter 4

# How Leaders Create and Use Networks

by **Herminia Ibarra and Mark Hunter**

*A summary of the full-length HBR article by **Herminia Ibarra and Mark Hunter**, highlighting key ideas.*

## **THE IDEA IN BRIEF**

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What separates successful leaders from the rest of the pack? Networking: creating a tissue of personal contacts to provide the support, feedback, and resources needed to get things done.

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Reprint [R0701C](#), *Harvard Business Review*, January 2007

## How to Network Effectively

Yet many leaders avoid networking. Some think they don't have time for it. Others disdain it as manipulative.

To succeed as a leader, Ibarra and Hunter recommend building three types of networks:

- **Operational**—people you need to accomplish your assigned, routine tasks.
- **Personal**—kindred spirits outside your organization who can help you with personal advancement.
- **Strategic**—people outside your control who will enable you to reach key organizational objectives.

You need all three types of networks. But to *really* succeed, you must master strategic networking—by interacting regularly with people who can open your eyes to new business opportunities and help you capitalize on them. Build your strategic network, and burnish your own—and your company's—performance.

## THE IDEA IN PRACTICE

The most effective leaders understand the differences among the three types of networks and how to build them.

	<b>Operational network</b>	<b>Personal network</b>	<b>Strategic network</b>
<b>Network's purpose</b>	Getting work done efficiently	Develop professional skills through coaching and mentoring; exchange important referrals and needed outside information.	Figure out future priorities and challenges; get stakeholder support for them.
<b>How to find network members</b>	Identify individuals who can block or support a project.	Participate in professional associations, alumni groups, clubs, and personal-interest communities.	Identify lateral and vertical relationships with other functional and business-unit managers—people outside your immediate control—who can help you determine how your role and contribution fit into the overall picture.

## Leveraging Your Networks

Networking takes work. To lessen the pain and increase the gain:

- **Mind your mind-set.** Accept that networking is one of the most important requirements of a leadership role. To overcome any qualms about it, identify a person you respect who networks effectively and ethically. Observe how he or she uses networks to accomplish goals.

## How to Network Effectively

- **Reallocate your time.** Master the art of delegation to liberate time you can then spend on cultivating networks.
- **Establish connections.** Create reasons for interacting with people outside your function or organization; for instance, by taking advantage of social interests to set the stage for addressing strategic concerns.

*Example:* An investment banker invited key clients to the theater (a passion of hers) several times a year. Through these events, she developed her own business *and* learned things about her clients' companies that generated business and ideas for other divisions in her firm.

- **Give and take continually.** Don't wait until you really need something badly to ask for a favor from a network member. Instead, take every opportunity to give to—and receive from—people in your networks, whether you need help or not.

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When Henrik Balmer became the production manager and a board member of a newly bought-out cosmetics firm, improving his network was the last thing on his mind. The main problem he faced was time: Where would he find the hours to guide his team through a major upgrade of the production process and then think about strategic issues like expanding the business? The only way he could carve out time and still get home to his family at a decent hour was to lock himself—liter-

ally—in his office. Meanwhile, there were day-to-day issues to resolve, like a recurring conflict with his sales director over custom orders that compromised production efficiency. Networking, which Henrik defined as the unpleasant task of trading favors with strangers, was a luxury he could not afford. But when a new acquisition was presented at a board meeting without his input, he abruptly realized he was out of the loop—not just inside the company, but outside, too—at a moment when his future in the company was at stake.

Henrik's case is not unusual. Over the past two years, we have been following a cohort of 30 managers making their way through what we call the leadership transition, an inflection point in their careers that challenges them to rethink both themselves and their roles. In the process, we've found that networking—creating a fabric of personal contacts who will provide support, feedback, insight, resources, and information—is simultaneously one of the most self-evident and one of the most dreaded developmental challenges that aspiring leaders must address.

Their discomfort is understandable. Typically, managers rise through the ranks by dint of a strong command of the technical elements of their jobs and a nose-to-the-grindstone focus on accomplishing their teams' objectives. When challenged to move beyond their functional specialties and address strategic issues facing the overall business, many managers do not immediately grasp that this will involve relational—not analytical—tasks. Nor do they easily understand that exchanges and interactions with a diverse array of current and potential stakeholders are not distractions from their “real work” but are actually at the heart of their new leadership roles.

## How to Network Effectively

Like Henrik (whose identity we've disguised, along with all the other managers we describe here), a majority of the managers we work with say that they find networking insincere or manipulative—at best, an elegant way of using people. Not surprisingly, for every manager who instinctively constructs and maintains a useful network, we see several who struggle to overcome this innate resistance. Yet the alternative to networking is to fail—either in reaching for a leadership position or in succeeding at it.

Watching our emerging leaders approach this daunting task, we discovered that three distinct but interdependent forms of networking—*operational*, *personal*, and *strategic*—played a vital role in their transitions. The first helped them manage current internal responsibilities, the second boosted their personal development, and the third opened their eyes to new business directions and the stakeholders they would need to enlist. While our managers differed in how well they pursued operational and personal networking, we discovered that almost all of them underutilized strategic networking. In this article, we describe key features of each networking form (summarized in the exhibit “The Three Forms of Networking”) and, using our managers’ experiences, explain how a three-pronged networking strategy can become part and parcel of a new leader’s development plan.

### Operational Networking

All managers need to build good working relationships with the people who can help them do their jobs. The number and breadth of people involved can be impres-

### The Three Forms of Networking

Managers who think they are adept at networking are often operating only at an operational or personal level. Effective leaders learn to employ networks for strategic purposes.

	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Getting work done efficiently; maintaining the capacities and functions required of the group.	Enhancing personal and professional development; providing referrals to useful information and contacts.	Figuring out future priorities and challenges; getting stakeholder support for them.
<b>Location and temporal orientation</b>	Contacts are mostly internal and oriented toward current demands.	Contacts are mostly external and oriented toward current interests and future potential interests.	Contacts are internal and external and oriented toward the future.
<b>Players and recruitment</b>	Key contacts are relatively non-discretionary; they are prescribed mostly by the task and organizational structure, so it is very clear who is relevant.	Key contacts are mostly discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.	Key contacts follow from the strategic context and the organizational environment, but specific membership is discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.
<b>Network attributes and key behaviors</b>	Depth: building strong working relationships.	Breadth: reaching out to contacts who can make referrals.	Leverage: creating inside-outside links.

### How to Network Effectively

sive—such operational networks include not only direct reports and superiors but also peers within an operational unit, other internal players with the power to block or support a project, and key outsiders such as suppliers, distributors, and customers. The purpose of this type of networking is to ensure coordination and cooperation among people who have to know and trust one another in order to accomplish their immediate tasks. That isn't always easy, but it is relatively straightforward, because the task provides focus and a clear criterion for membership in the network: Either you're necessary to the job and helping to get it done, or you're not.

Although operational networking was the form that came most naturally to the managers we studied, nearly every one had important blind spots regarding people and groups they depended on to make things happen. In one case, Alistair, an accounting manager who worked in an entrepreneurial firm with several hundred employees, was suddenly promoted by the company's founder to financial director and given a seat on the board. He was both the youngest and the least-experienced board member, and his instinctive response to these new responsibilities was to reestablish his functional credentials. Acting on a hint from the founder that the company might go public, Alistair undertook a reorganization of the accounting department that would enable the books to withstand close scrutiny. Alistair succeeded brilliantly in upgrading his team's capabilities, but he missed the fact that only a minority of the seven-person board shared the founder's ambition. A year into Alistair's tenure, discussion about whether to take the company public polarized the board,

and he discovered that all that time cleaning up the books might have been better spent sounding out his codirectors.

One of the problems with an exclusive reliance on operational networks is that they are usually geared toward meeting objectives as assigned, not toward asking the strategic question, “What *should* we be doing?” By the same token, managers do not exercise as much personal choice in assembling operational relationships as they do in weaving personal and strategic networks, because to a large extent the right relationships are prescribed by the job and organizational structure. Thus, most operational networking occurs within an organization, and ties are determined in large part by routine, short-term demands. Relationships formed with outsiders, such as board members, customers, and regulators, are directly task-related and tend to be bounded and constrained by demands determined at a higher level. Of course, an individual manager can choose to deepen and develop the ties to different extents, and all managers exercise discretion over who gets priority attention. It’s the quality of relationships—the rapport and mutual trust—that gives an operational network its power. Nonetheless, the substantial constraints on network membership mean these connections are unlikely to deliver value to managers beyond assistance with the task at hand.

The typical manager in our group was more concerned with sustaining cooperation within the existing network than with building relationships to face nonroutine or unforeseen challenges. But as a manager moves into a leadership role, his or her network must reorient itself externally and toward the future.

## Personal Networking

We observed that once aspiring leaders like Alistair awoken to the dangers of an excessively internal focus, they begin to seek kindred spirits outside their organizations. Simultaneously, they become aware of the limitations of their social skills, such as a lack of knowledge about professional domains beyond their own, which makes it difficult for them to find common ground with people outside their usual circles. Through professional associations, alumni groups, clubs, and personal interest communities, managers gain new perspectives that allow them to advance in their careers. This is what we mean by personal networking.

Many of the managers we study question why they should spend precious time on an activity so indirectly related to the work at hand. Why widen one's circle of casual acquaintances when there isn't time even for urgent tasks? The answer is that these contacts provide important referrals, information, and, often, developmental support such as coaching and mentoring. A newly appointed factory director, for example, faced with a turnaround-or-close-down situation that was paralyzing his staff, joined a business organization—and through it met a lawyer who became his counsel in the turnaround. Buoyed by his success, he networked within his company's headquarters in search of someone who had dealt with a similar crisis. Eventually, he found two mentors.

A personal network can also be a safe space for personal development and as such can provide a foundation for strategic networking. The experience of Timothy, a principal in a midsize software company, is a good ex-

ample. Like his father, Timothy stuttered. When he had the opportunity to prepare for meetings, his stutter was not an issue, but spontaneous encounters inside and outside the company were dreadfully painful. To solve this problem, he began accepting at least two invitations per week to the social gatherings he had assiduously ignored before. Before each event, he asked who else had been invited and did background research on the other guests so that he could initiate conversations. The hardest part, he said, was “getting through the door.” Once inside, his interest in the conversations helped him forget himself and master his stutter. As his stutter diminished, he also applied himself to networking across his company, whereas previously he had taken refuge in his technical expertise. Like Timothy, several of our emerging leaders successfully used personal networking as a relatively safe way to expose problems and seek insight into solutions—safe, that is, compared with strategic networking, in which the stakes are far higher.

Personal networks are largely external, made up of discretionary links to people with whom we have something in common. As a result, what makes a personal network powerful is its referral potential. According to the famous six degrees of separation principle, our personal contacts are valuable to the extent that they help us reach, in as few connections as possible, the far-off person who has the information we need.

In watching managers struggle to widen their professional relationships in ways that feel both natural and legitimate to them, we repeatedly saw them shift their time and energy from operational to personal network-

## How to Network Effectively

ing. For people who have rarely looked outside their organizations, this is an important first step, one that fosters a deeper understanding of themselves and the environments in which they move. Ultimately, however, personal networking alone won't propel managers through the leadership transition. Aspiring leaders may find people who awaken new interests but fail to become comfortable with the power players at the level above them. Or they may achieve new influence within a professional community but fail to harness those ties in the service of organizational goals. That's why managers who know they need to develop their networking skills, and make a real effort to do so, nonetheless may end up feeling like they have wasted their time and energy. As we'll see, personal networking will not help a manager through the leadership transition unless he or she learns how to bring those connections to bear on organizational strategy.

## Strategic Networking

When managers begin the delicate transition from functional manager to business leader, they must start to concern themselves with broad strategic issues. Lateral and vertical relationships with other functional and business-unit managers—all people outside their immediate control—become a lifeline for figuring out how their own contributions fit into the big picture. Thus strategic networking plugs the aspiring leader into a set of relationships and information sources that collectively embody the power to achieve personal and organizational goals.

Operating beside players with diverse affiliations, backgrounds, objectives, and incentives requires a manager to formulate business rather than functional objectives, and to work through the coalitions and networks needed to sell ideas and compete for resources. Consider Sophie, a manager who, after rising steadily through the ranks in logistics and distribution, was stupefied to learn that the CEO was considering a radical reorganization of her function that would strip her of some responsibilities. Rewarded to date for incremental annual improvements, she had failed to notice shifting priorities in the wider market and the resulting internal shuffle for resources and power at the higher levels of her company. Although she had built a loyal, high-performing team, she had few relationships outside her group to help her anticipate the new imperatives, let alone give her ideas about how to respond. After she argued that distribution issues were her purview, and failed to be persuasive, she hired consultants to help her prepare a counterproposal. But Sophie's boss simply concluded that she lacked a broad, longer-term business perspective. Frustrated, Sophie contemplated leaving the company. Only after some patient coaching from a senior manager did she understand that she had to get out of her unit and start talking to opinion leaders inside and outside the company to form a sellable plan for the future.

What differentiates a leader from a manager, research tells us, is the ability to figure out where to go and to enlist the people and groups necessary to get there. Recruiting stakeholders, lining up allies and sympathizers, diagnosing the political landscape, and brokering conversations

## How to Network Effectively

among unconnected parties are all part of a leader's job. As they step up to the leadership transition, some managers accept their growing dependence on others and seek to transform it into mutual influence. Others dismiss such work as "political" and, as a result, undermine their ability to advance their goals.

Several of the participants in our sample chose the latter approach, justifying their choice as a matter of personal values and integrity. In one case, Jody, who managed a department in a large company under what she described as "dysfunctional" leadership, refused even to try to activate her extensive network within the firm when internal adversaries took over key functions of her unit. When we asked her why she didn't seek help from anyone in the organization to stop this coup, she replied that she refused to play "stupid political games....You can only do what you think is the ethical and right thing from your perspective." Stupid or not, those games cost her the respect and support of her direct reports and coworkers, who hesitated to follow someone they perceived as unwilling to defend herself. Eventually she had no choice but to leave.

The key to a good strategic network is leverage: the ability to marshal information, support, and resources from one sector of a network to achieve results in another. Strategic networkers use indirect influence, convincing one person in the network to get someone else, who is not in the network, to take a needed action. Moreover, strategic networkers don't just influence their relational environment; they shape it in their own image by moving and hiring subordinates, changing suppliers and sources

of financing, lobbying to place allies in peer positions, and even restructuring their boards to create networks favorable to their business goals. Jody abjured such tactics, but her adversaries did not.

Strategic networking can be difficult for emerging leaders because it absorbs a significant amount of the time and energy that managers usually devote to meeting their many operational demands. This is one reason why many managers drop their strategic networking precisely when they need it most: when their units are in trouble and only outside support can rescue them. The trick is not to hide in the operational network but to develop it into a more strategic one.

One manager we studied, for example, used lateral and functional contacts throughout his firm to resolve tensions with his boss that resulted from substantial differences in style and strategic approaches between the two. Tied down in operational chores at a distant location, the manager had lost contact with headquarters. He resolved the situation by simultaneously obliging his direct reports to take on more of the local management effort and sending messages through his network that would help bring him back into the loop with the boss.

Operational, personal, and strategic networks are not mutually exclusive. One manager we studied used his personal passion, hunting, to meet people from professions as diverse as stonemasonry and household moving. Almost none of these hunting friends had anything to do with his work in the consumer electronics industry, yet they all had to deal with one of his own daily concerns: customer relations. Hearing about their problems and

## How to Network Effectively

techniques allowed him to view his own from a different perspective and helped him define principles that he could test in his work. Ultimately, what began as a personal network of hunting partners became operationally and strategically valuable to this manager. The key was his ability to build inside-outside links for maximum leverage. But we've seen others who avoided networking, or failed at it, because they let interpersonal chemistry, not strategic needs, determine which relationships they cultivated.

### **Just Do It**

The word “work” is part of networking, and it is not easy work, because it involves reaching outside the borders of a manager's comfort zone. How, then, can managers lessen the pain and increase the gain? The trick is to leverage the elements from each domain of networking into the others—to seek out personal contacts who can be objective, strategic counselors, for example, or to transform colleagues in adjacent functions into a constituency. Above all, many managers will need to change their attitudes about the legitimacy and necessity of networking.

### ***Mind your mind-set***

In our ongoing discussions with managers learning to improve their networking skills, we often hear, “That's all well and good, but I already have a day job.” Others, like Jody, consider working through networks a way to rely on “whom you know” rather than “what you know”—a hypocritical, even unethical way to get things done. Whatever the reason,

when aspiring leaders do not believe that networking is one of the most important requirements of their new jobs, they will not allocate enough time and effort to see it pay off.

The best solution we've seen to this trap is a good role model. Many times, what appears to be unpalatable or unproductive behavior takes on a new light when a person you respect does it well and ethically. For example, Gabriel Chenard, general manager for Europe of a group of consumer product brands, learned from the previous general manager how to take advantage of branch visits to solidify his relationships with employees and customers. Every flight and car trip became a venue for catching up and building relationships with the people who were accompanying him. Watching how much his boss got done on what would otherwise be downtime, Gabriel adopted the practice as a crucial part of his own management style. Networking effectively and ethically, like any other tacit skill, is a matter of judgment and intuition. We learn by observing and getting feedback from those for whom it's second nature.

### ***Work from the outside in***

One of the most daunting aspects of strategic networking is that there often seems to be no natural "excuse" for making contact with a more senior person outside one's function or business unit. It's difficult to build a relationship with anyone, let alone a senior executive, without a reason for interacting, like a common task or a shared purpose.

Some successful managers find common ground from the outside in—by, for instance, transposing a personal interest into the strategic domain. Linda Henderson is

## How to Network Effectively

a good example. An investment banker responsible for a group of media industry clients, she always wondered how to connect to some of her senior colleagues who served other industries. She resolved to make time for an extracurricular passion—the theater—in a way that would enhance her business development activities. Four times a year, her secretary booked a buffet dinner at a downtown hotel and reserved a block of theater tickets. Key clients were invited. Through these events, Linda not only developed her own business but also learned about her clients' companies in a way that generated ideas for other parts of her firm, thus enabling her to engage with colleagues.

Other managers build outside-inside connections by using their functional interests or expertise. For example, communities of practice exist (or can easily be created on the internet) in almost every area of business from brand management to Six Sigma to global strategy. Savvy managers reach out to kindred spirits outside their organizations to contribute and multiply their knowledge; the information they glean, in more cases than not, becomes the “hook” for making internal connections.

### ***Reallocate your time***

If an aspiring leader has not yet mastered the art of delegation, he or she will find many reasons not to spend time networking. Participating in formal and informal meetings with people in other units takes time away from functional responsibilities and internal team affairs. Between the obvious payoff of a task accomplished and the ambiguous, often delayed rewards of networking, naive managers repeatedly choose the former. The less they

practice networking, the less efficient at it they become, and the vicious cycle continues.

Henrik, the production manager and board member we described earlier, for example, did what he needed to do in order to prepare for board meetings but did not associate with fellow board members outside those formal events. As a result, he was frequently surprised when other board members raised issues at the heart of his role. In contrast, effective business leaders spend a lot of time every day gathering the information they need to meet their goals, relying on informal discussions with a lot of people who are not necessarily in charge of an issue or task. They network in order to obtain information continually, not just at formal meetings.

### ***Ask and you shall receive***

Many managers equate having a good network with having a large database of contacts, or attending high-profile professional conferences and events. In fact, we've seen people kick off a networking initiative by improving their record keeping or adopting a network management tool. But they falter at the next step—picking up the phone. Instead, they wait until they need something *badly*. The best networkers do exactly the opposite: They take every opportunity to give to, and receive from, the network, whether they need help or not.

A network lives and thrives only when it is used. A good way to begin is to make a simple request or take the initiative to connect two people who would benefit from meeting each other. Doing something—anything—gets the ball rolling and builds confidence that one does, in fact, have something to contribute.

***Stick to it***

It takes a while to reap the benefits of networking. We have seen many managers resolve to put networking at the top of their agendas, only to be derailed by the first crisis that comes along. One example is Harris Roberts, a regulatory affairs expert who realized he needed a broader network to achieve his goal of becoming a business-unit manager. To force himself into what felt like an “unnatural act,” Harris volunteered to be the liaison for his business school cohort’s alumni network. But six months later, when a major new-drug approval process overwhelmed his calendar, Harris dropped all outside activities. Two years later, he found himself out of touch and still a functional manager. He failed to recognize that by not taking the time to attend industry conferences or compare notes with his peers, he was missing out on the strategic perspective and information that would make him a more attractive candidate for promotion.

Building a leadership network is less a matter of skill than of will. When first efforts do not bring quick rewards, some may simply conclude that networking isn’t among their talents. But networking is not a talent; nor does it require a gregarious, extroverted personality. It is a skill, one that takes practice. We have seen over and over again that people who work at networking can learn not only how to do it well but also how to enjoy it. And they tend to be more successful in their careers than those who fail to leverage external ties or insist on defining their jobs narrowly.

Making a successful leadership transition requires a shift from the confines of a clearly defined operational network. Aspiring leaders must learn to build and use strategic networks that cross organizational and functional boundaries, and then link them up in novel and innovative ways. It is a challenge to make the leap from a lifetime of functional contributions and hands-on control to the ambiguous process of building and working through networks. Leaders must find new ways of defining themselves and develop new relationships to anchor and feed their emerging personas. They must also accept that networking is one of the most important requirements of their new leadership roles and continue to allocate enough time and effort to see it pay off.

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# Chapter 5

## How to Build Your Network

by **Brian Uzzi and Shannon Dunlap**

**Editor's Note:** Earlier in this guide, Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback suggested one way of mapping your network and making it more potent. Here's another approach to try.

If you were to ask your colleagues, “Who was Paul Revere?” most would probably know the answer. He was, after all, immortalized in the Longfellow poem that begins, “Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.” Yet how many of your colleagues, students of American history aside, would be familiar with William Dawes? Both men rode on horseback from Boston on the night of April 18, 1775. Both sounded the alarm that the Revolutionary War had begun. Dawes

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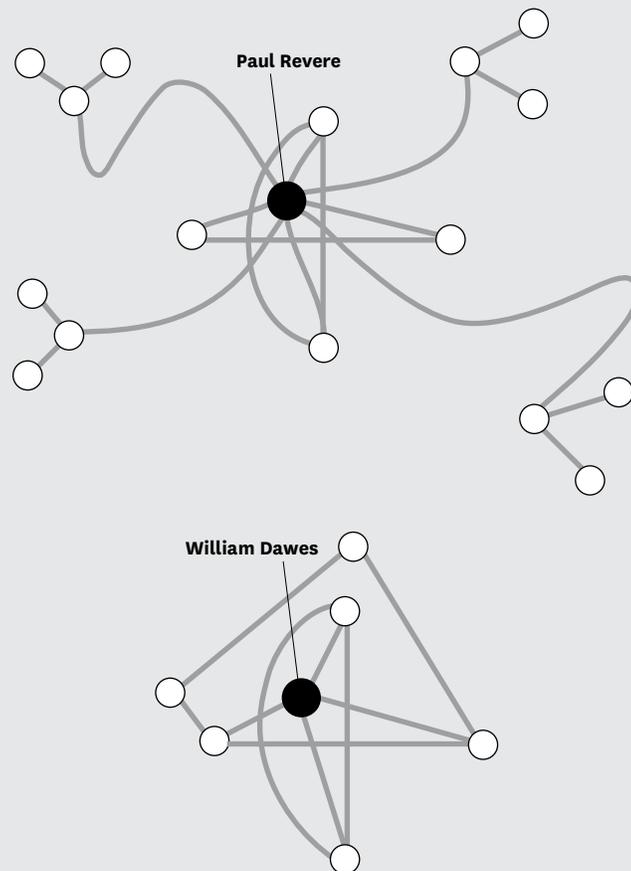
rode south while Revere rode north, but the towns they traveled through were demographically similar. Both men came from the same social class and had similar educational backgrounds. But only Revere raised a militia, and only Revere's name became famous. What accounts for the difference? In large part, the type of social network each man cultivated.

Paul Revere was an *information broker*, a person who occupies a key role in a social network by connecting disparate groups of people. Because Revere targeted other well-connected people during his ride, his news spread widely and quickly, as explained in Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, for example. William Dawes was not an information broker, so he didn't know which doors to knock on when he entered a new town. As a result, the information he carried was circulated within a small group of people instead of expanding outward. (See the exhibit "The Networks of Paul Revere and William Dawes.")

Now imagine that the information being ferried by messengers isn't about redcoats but about a new product idea or a different way to manage a team. If that information isn't delivered to the right people, it will wither and die. For example, before Microsoft was a household name, Bill Gates had a singular distinction in his network—his mother, Mary Gates, who sat on the board of United Way with John Akers, a high-level IBM executive. At the time, Akers was helping to lead IBM into the desktop computer business. Mary Gates talked to Akers about the new breed of small companies in the computer industry, which she felt were underappreciated competitors of

### THE NETWORKS OF PAUL REVERE AND WILLIAM DAWES

Paul Revere's social network connects multiple clusters of people who are linked through Revere himself, while William Dawes's network is just one big cluster. It's easy to see why news carried by Revere would reach a wider audience than news carried by Dawes.



the larger firms with which IBM traditionally partnered. Maybe she changed Akers's vision of who to go to for the new IBM PC's DOS, or maybe her comments confirmed what he already knew. In either case, after their conversation, Akers took proposals from small companies, one of which was Microsoft. The rest is history: Microsoft won the DOS contract and eventually eclipsed IBM as the world's most powerful computer company. Without Bill Gates's potent network, a sensational new operating system might have faded into obscurity just like William Dawes.

Studies have shown the same correlations between networks like Paul Revere's and success in various commercial ventures. Networks determine which ideas become breakthroughs, which new drugs are prescribed, which farmers cultivate pest-resistant crops, and which R&D engineers make the most high-impact discoveries. In a monumental 1998 study of innovations in science, art, and philosophy, sociologist Randall Collins of the University of Pennsylvania showed that breakthroughs from icons such as the seven sages of antiquity, Freud, Picasso, Watson and Crick, and Pythagoras were the consequence of a particular type of personal network that prompted exceptional individual creativity. In fact, Collins could find only three exceptions in all of recorded history: Taoist metaphysician Wang Chung, Zen spiritualist Bassui Tokusho, and the Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldun.

In this article, we'll take a close look at the inner workings of networks. We'll also show you how to diagnose your current network, create a more potent one, and then actively manage it.

## A Powerful System

Networks deliver three unique advantages: private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power. Executives see these advantages at work every day, but might not pause to consider how their networks regulate them.

When we make judgments, we use both public and private information. These days, public information is easily available from a variety of sources, including the internet; but precisely because it is so accessible, public information offers significantly less competitive advantage than it used to.

Private information, by contrast, is gathered from personal contacts who can offer something unique that cannot be found in the public domain, such as the release date of a new product, unpublished software code, or knowledge about what a particular interviewer looks for in candidates. Private information, therefore, can give top executives an edge, though it is more subjective than public information because usually it is not verified by an independent party, such as Dun & Bradstreet. Consequently, the value of your private information to others—and the value of others' private information to you—depends on how much trust exists in the network of relationships.

Lisa Bristol (not her real name) is the president of a financial institution in the mortgage-lending industry. Historically, her firm had hesitated to share private information with potential alliance partners for fear of appropriation or misinterpretation. Bristol realized, however, that when she began developing trust with them through trade shows and informal shared activi-

ties, private information started to flow in both directions. This helped Bristol solve problems and develop financial strategies more efficiently than when she relied solely on public information, which most of her competitors also possessed. For example, the public information concerning her industry indicated that success was based on price points. But, through her network, Bristol became one of the first executives to piece together the features of her industry's new competitive driver: She learned that some companies had been experimenting with value-added services and that they were achieving greater success than companies that relied on price points. By using this information, she was able to position her company at the forefront of this trend and capture market share before other companies attempted to move into the niche.

The next advantage that a network like Paul Revere's confers is access to a diverse array of skill sets. Linus Pauling, one of only two people to win a Nobel Prize in two different areas and considered one of the towering geniuses of the 20th century, attributed his creative success not to his immense brainpower or luck but to his diverse contacts: "The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas." While expertise has become more specialized during the past 15 years, organizational, product, and marketing issues have become more interdisciplinary, which means that individual success is tied to the ability to transcend natural skill limitations through others. Highly diverse network ties, therefore, can help you develop more complete, creative, and unbiased views of issues. And when you trade information or skills with people whose experiences differ from your

own, you provide one another with unique, exceptionally valuable resources.

The final advantage of a network like Paul Revere's is power. Traditionally, executive power was embedded in a firm's hierarchy. When corporate organizations became flatter, more like pancakes than pyramids, that power was repositioned in the network's information brokers, who could adapt to changes in the organization, develop clients, and synthesize opposing points of view. These brokers weren't necessarily at the top of the hierarchy or experts in their fields, but they linked specialists in the firm with trustworthy and informative ties.

Most personal networks are highly clustered—that is, an individual's friends are likely to be friends with one another as well. Most corporate networks are made up of several clusters but with few links between them. Brokers are especially powerful because they connect the separate clusters, thus stimulating collaboration and exploiting arbitrage among otherwise independent specialists.

When Bristol actively expanded her network to include people whose expertise and positions differed from her own, she could link with brokers in her own field as well as in other areas that were strategically important to mortgage lending. These ties spurred creative problem solving and prompted invitations for Bristol to speak at industry events that valued and showcased forward thinkers. Soon, she earned a reputation for spotting promising innovations in their preview stages. Informal post-talk discussions spilled over into formal office discussions, and Bristol went on to lead an advisory group made up of 10 high-level financial executives. Bristol didn't need

to change her work style fundamentally or develop an entirely new expertise to achieve this success. Rather, she used her new network to turn what she already knew into power, both individually and for her firm.

Sometimes, however, the advantages of private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power, can work in opposition to one another. Choosing contacts to maximize a sense of trust in your network, for example, can inadvertently undercut its diversity—that’s what thwarted William Dawes’s network. You can avoid the pitfalls, but first you must learn how to diagnose your network.

### **Diagnose Your Network**

You can use a work sheet like the one in the exhibit “How to Map Your Network” to determine what type of network you currently have, discover how your networking practices can lead to one kind of network or another, and overcome the key paradoxes of network building. Starting with the left-hand column of the work sheet, fill in the names of the most important contacts in your network—people you rely on for the exchange of private information, specialized expertise, advice, and creative inspiration. A crucial contact could be your former college roommate who has become influential in an area of interest to you and your firm, a current business associate, an old colleague from the first company you ever worked for, or your brother-in-law. As you write in each name, think of the resources you exchange with that person, the quid pro quos, and the strength of your ties.

After you identify your key contacts, think about how you first met them. In the center column of the work

**HOW TO MAP YOUR NETWORK**

This exhibit reveals part of coauthor Brian Uzzi’s completed work sheet. At the top of his list, for example, is Mark Granovetter, who was Uzzi’s graduate school adviser. Granovetter shares his research with Uzzi before it reaches the public domain and reads Uzzi’s papers before they’re sent out for review.

The work sheet also reveals that Uzzi’s superconnector is Steve Alltop. He introduced Uzzi to both Greg Duncan and Henry Bienen, who are individually vital to Uzzi’s network.

Name of Contact	Who introduced you to the contact?	To whom did you introduce the contact?
Mark Granovetter	Me	
Greg Duncan	<b>Steve Alltop</b>	<b>superconnector</b>
Henry Bienen	<b>Steve Alltop</b>	
John Wolken	Mitch Petersen	

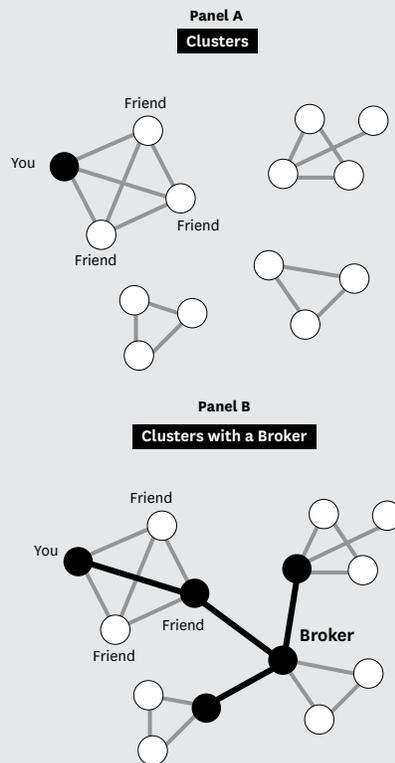
sheet, write the name of the person who introduced you to your contact (if you met the person yourself, write “me”). This column will reveal the brokers in your network and help you see the networking practices you used to connect with them. In the right-hand column, write the name of someone you introduced to your key contact. This column will demonstrate how you act as a broker for others.

Once your data is filled in, look at the number of times “me” appears in the center column. According to our studies, if you’ve introduced yourself to your key contacts more than 65% of the time, then you’re probably building your network using the *self-similarity principle* and your network may be too inbred. The self-similarity principle states that, when you make network contacts, you tend to choose people who resemble you in terms of experience, training, worldview, and so on. We have found that executives, in particular, disproportionately use the self-similarity principle to build their networks. Obviously, it is easier to trust someone who views the world through the same lens you do; you expect that person to act as you would in ambiguous situations. What’s more, working with people who share your background is often very efficient: You both recognize concepts that allow you to transfer information quickly, and you are less likely to challenge one another’s ideas. Finally, like-minded people will usually affirm your point of view and, as a result, gratify your ego.

Our research shows, however, that these benefits offer diminishing returns—and can even turn negative. Too much similarity restricts your access to discrepant information, which is crucial to both creativity and problem solving. If all your contacts think the way you do, who will question your reasoning or push you to expand your horizon? And because, over time, people tend to introduce their contacts to one another so that everyone becomes friends, the similarity of thought and skill reverberates, creating what we call an echo chamber. (See the exhibit “The Importance of Brokers in Companies.”)

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BROKERS IN COMPANIES

Panel A shows that social networks are typically separate clusters—friends of friends are also friends with one another, and they share similarities with the creator of the network, creating what we call an echo chamber. Friendship clusters within companies are no different from friendship clusters outside work. But Panel B shows how brokers within companies can connect the specialized pools of knowledge by linking independent clusters together—giving every member of each cluster better access to other parts of the companywide network.



The self-similarity principle contains pitfalls, however, and even strategic thinkers can be oblivious to them. An excellent illustration comes from Columbia University management professors Paul Ingram and Michael W. Morris. They conducted a study in 2002 to investigate whether executives in the process of making new contacts would fall prey to the self-similarity principle. As part of Columbia's executive MBA program, students were invited to a "business mixer" for a chance to meet new people. At the event, each student wore an inconspicuous electronic device, similar to ones used by a local dating service, that recorded who they talked to and for how long. A survey taken before the event indicated that the executives' primary goal was to meet as many different people as possible. In practice, however, the students formed new ties with others who were most like them—the investment bankers connected with other investment bankers, the marketing executives talked to other marketing executives, and so on. The most successful networker that evening, in fact, turned out to be the bartender.

Another obstacle to diversity in networks is the *proximity principle*, which holds that workers prefer to populate their networks with the people they spend the most time with, such as colleagues in their department. The reason this principle works against building efficient networks is that the world is organized by like things—people with the same training tend to be in the same department, just as people with similar backgrounds tend to live in the same neighborhood. If you follow your natural tendencies and build networks according to the prox-

imity and self-similarity principles, you will create echo chambers in your network and reduce opportunities to enrich your networks with greater diversity.

## **Forge Better Connections**

The best way to break through the barriers created by the self-similarity and proximity principles is by using the *shared activities principle*. Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high-stakes activities that connect you with diverse others. Think again about Bill Gates. Schmoozing didn't connect Mary Gates with IBM's Akers; rather, their trust, exchange of private information, and access to each other's diverse skills were by-products of their work on the same nonprofit board—a shared activity. Any executive can participate in and benefit from a variety of shared activities, including sports teams, community service ventures, interdepartmental initiatives, voluntary associations, for-profit boards, cross-functional teams, and charitable foundations.

The secret to understanding the power of shared activities in building networks begins with recognizing that not all shared activities are equally potent. Like Gates and Akers's work on a nonprofit board, activities that evoke passion in participants, necessitate interdependence, and have something at stake are more likely to produce networks like Paul Revere's. Someone who cares passionately about an activity will find a way to fit it into his or her busy schedule. And reliance on others to get the job done can build trust quickly, even among diverse individuals. Finally, having something at stake—competing for a

prize, breaking a personal record, or achieving a long-term goal—provides opportunities for celebration and commiseration, both of which generate bonds of loyalty that sustain a relationship over time. Consequently, in terms of building your network, an independent activity such as running won't help you nearly as much as joining a running club. And you'll form the strongest ties with other runners in a club when you train with them for a race.

Shared activities bring together a cross-section of disparate individuals around a common point of interest, instead of connecting similar individuals with shared backgrounds. They let you observe your contacts in a wide range of situations. Participation in a shared activity allows for unscripted behaviors and natural responses to unexpected events—things that rarely show up during business lunches or office meetings, where impressions are managed and presentations are carefully rehearsed. Moreover, because these responses are spontaneous, they are more likely to be perceived as genuine, stable attributes of character that apply not only to the current activity but to other pursuits as well, including commercial endeavors. And because the opportunities for celebration and commiseration generate bonds of loyalty, these diverse individuals can enjoy close working relationships that they might not otherwise have formed.

Todd Reding, a client development executive for non-profit firms, has witnessed the benefits of shared activities firsthand. Whenever he can, he meets with potential donors through shared activities that are outside a typical business setting. In one instance, Reding expressed interest in a potential donor's passion for competitive

waterskiing. The donor invited Reding to try it himself, then spent several hours coaching him through a challenging slalom course, shortening the rope to the boat after each run so that Reding's turns became sharper and faster. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, the men quickly began to trust each other as they observed their reactions to unexpected events and shared the emotional roller coaster of failing—and then getting it right.

Shared activities also forge ties between diverse individuals by changing their usual patterns of interaction, letting them break out of their prescribed business roles of subordinate, relationship manager, aide, finance whiz, cognoscente, or president and stand out from the crowd. Reding's "I can step up to a challenge" actions distinguished him from other development executives, and the potential donor was able to see aspects of Reding's character that he felt were critical for putting his investment to proper use. Similarly, the donor's increased trust in Reding prompted the donor to reveal personal experiences that helped Reding revise his original proposal and secure a contribution.

Benjamin Weeks (not his real name), an executive at a life insurance company, has learned how to turn work situations into shared activities to manage upward relationships. Weeks, originally trained as a litigator, used his communication skills to write speeches for one of his company's more senior executives. Through this shared activity, Weeks and the executive moved away from the standard superior-subordinate relationship and formed a closer bond, sharing the highs and lows of their work. As they collaborated on the speeches, they learned about

each other's "blind spots and boundaries," as Weeks says, perhaps without even realizing what they were revealing. The interaction made them both more vulnerable but also generated opportunities to demonstrate their trustworthiness to each other. Soon Weeks found himself mediating between the executive and others in the company. "They know I'm the one who understands how he works," Weeks concluded.

In essence, the shared activities principle offers the benefits of the self-similarity and proximity principles without their downside—creating a redundant and inefficient network.

### **Go for Broke(rs)**

Returning to your work sheet, take a look at the names of your brokers in the center column. It's important to determine who your brokers are so you can discover what activities bring you into contact with them and how you can further develop those ties. Perhaps the individuals you listed are not obviously powerful broker candidates like CEOs or partners at law firms, but you can reach them and they are well connected to clusters outside your current circles.

Now examine the people listed multiple times in the first column and think about how you met them. The exhibit "How to Map Your Network" displays a partial list of coauthor Brian Uzzi's personal networks and suggests that Steve Alltop is an important broker; he connected Uzzi to Northwestern University's Greg Duncan and Henry Bienen. How did Alltop and Uzzi meet? Not in a business setting but as partners in an unexpected pickup game of squash—a shared activity. After that first encounter and a couple of follow-up rounds, Alltop asked

Uzzi to substitute for him in other squash games. That's when Uzzi met Bienen and Duncan, both of whom now figure largely in Uzzi's career.

Indeed Alltop, who is a senior lecturer of music and who also conducts the Northwestern University symphony orchestra, turned out to be a *superconnector*—a powerful broker who shares his diverse contacts. As conductor, he attends most major university events, from professional-school graduations to welcoming events for important donors and celebrity guests. Essentially, Alltop's occupation is one big shared activity, and this—not his level of formal power in the organization—accounts for his broad, diverse network.

To build a network rich in social capital, cultivate powerful brokers who aren't in positions of formal authority—the places where everyone else looks. For example, a crucial superconnector in Todd Reding's network was Pete Barnette (not his real name), an attorney he met through their joint links to a nonprofit board. Barnette was responsible for many of Reding's important business contacts in various locations, such as Chicago, Iowa, and Arkansas.

We've often been asked if a broker should be told of his or her role once an executive is aware of it. On one hand, telling a person that he is disproportionately important to your network could alter the relational dynamics. The broker might feel used or might want something in return that you cannot give. On the other hand, a disclosure could deepen the relationship by revealing gratitude and sincerity, which, in our estimation, is the best principle of action in a network.

When Reding meets brokers like Barnette, he openly tells them that he appreciates their assistance in mak-

ing new contacts. The brokers are always flattered and willing to help, he says. Similarly, Uzzi's revelation to Alltop that he was a superconnector turned into concrete business implications for Alltop. With new knowledge about how networks operate, Alltop decided to accept an offer to become conductor of the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra in Wyoming. He took the position not only because it was a great opportunity for him, but also because many of the CSO's musicians worked for other major orchestras in the off-season. Alltop realized that the connections he could make through the CSO could get his name on those other groups' radar screens. After two years in Cheyenne, Alltop's network paid off. Though he hadn't learned special new pieces of music or become more musically talented, he was invited to conduct a weeklong classical music festival in Bologna, Italy—a festival that attracts journalists, photographers, and radio and TV coverage—thus extending his reach even farther.

Research shows that if you create your networks with trust, diversity, and brokerage, you can raise your level of information from *what* you know to *who* you know.

More than 100 years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson reportedly declared during a lecture, “If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.” But Emerson was only half right. Creativity and insight are certainly important, but without an effective

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network, you may never spark your imagination, reinvent yourself, or declare your sensational news to the world.

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## Chapter 6

# Creating a Developmental Network

by Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback

Your *developmental network* consists of those who can help you make progress on your personal journey to success. Think of this network as your own board of advisers.

You cannot make progress alone. You need not only candid feedback but also protection and sponsorship, help learning new skills, coaching about how to handle difficult problems, freedom to express your feelings without fear, and access to opportunities. The members of your developmental network are those from whom you can seek such assistance. They won't tell you what

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Adapted from *Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader* (product #12285), by Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback, Harvard Business Review Press, 2011

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to do, but they can help you identify options, think through different alternatives, see yourself as others see you, make decisions that balance harm for some against a greater good, and handle the emotions that management arouses.

Because management is stressful—full of conflict, fragmentation, frustration, ambiguity, and the necessity of making decisions that touch people personally—a key function of your developmental network is to provide emotional support. For that, it should include confidants to whom you can express your feelings, fears, and shortcomings. These are people you trust personally, to whom you can risk exposing yourself and exploring personal and professional dilemmas, and whose experience and judgment you respect.

Because of its nature, this network will almost certainly be smaller than your others. It may share some members with them, but it should also include people who have little stake in your work that might color what they tell you. So choose its members carefully. Seek candor and honesty. Seek diversity, too, in order to obtain the different forms of help you will need on your journey. Avoid those whose personal and professional agendas may overwhelm their ability to focus on your best interests. Be willing to serve in the developmental networks of those who serve in yours.

Members in your developmental network can come from virtually anywhere, including your circle of personal friends, but certain groups or individuals are more likely to be involved than others.

***Do you include your peers?***

This is the group that many professionals feel most comfortable approaching for insight and help. Peers pose fewer issues of hierarchy and status to complicate things. Because many of them do work similar to yours, you can receive a different but empathetic point of view, discuss problems openly and freely, test ideas and approaches, and seek candid feedback about how they and others see you and your group. They can suggest new ways of thinking or good questions to consider. Little wonder peer relationships can be close, especially between those promoted to similar positions at the same time, and last a long time. For many of us, these are the closest personal relationships we have at work.

Yet peer relationships can be problematic, too. Peers can be your competitors at work—for promotion, resources, and attention—which may limit their ability to give you unbiased help. That they work at the same level as you limits the depth and quality of what they can tell you, particularly about how to advance further.

For those reasons, and because you will need greater depth and diversity of advice as you make progress, your developmental networks must include more than peers.

***Do you include your boss?***

Many professionals view their bosses as threats, as opposed to allies, in their development. They only turn to superiors for help when there's a crisis of some sort. Fortunately, they're often surprised to receive a more supportive response than they expected. If you shoulder

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responsibility for your own development and take the initiative, you may find your boss a valuable source of feedback, information, and guidance.

Not all bosses can or want to play this role. So proceed slowly, and test how far you can go at each stage—especially if you have a boss who is new to his position. He, too, will have his insecurities and will be learning how to be an effective coach.

### ***Do you include those who work for you?***

It's unlikely you will—or should—go to your subordinates for personal advice. But don't overlook them as an important source of feedback. These are the very people you're trying to influence, and you need to know the effects on them of your words and actions.

To get their real thoughts, you need their trust, which takes time to develop. It will help if you're open about your desire to improve and if you admit your own mistakes and shortcomings and how you plan to overcome them. Sometimes it's more fruitful to ask not for their personal opinions but what “people” in general think.

Many managers resist this approach. They're overly fearful of appearing weak, uncertain, and ineffectual. There's a fine line here, and you must use your judgment, situation by situation, to stay on the positive side of it. But hollow confidence and misperception of your effect on others are hardly better and likely worse.

When seeking feedback, ask your people to identify ways you're fostering or hindering the ability of the team to do its best work. Find out whether there are any opportunities, in your people's opinions, for you to do a better job.

***Do you learn from role models?***

There often exists a vast gap between knowing *what* to do and knowing *how* to do it. To learn the *how*, find other professionals you admire, who possess skills and expertise you lack. Learn by watching them actually do what you hope to do. But don't simply mimic others. As organizational behavior expert Herminia Ibarra suggests in "Making Partner" (HBR March 2000), experiment with different approaches until you find those that feel authentic and comfortable and produce the results you want. In the end, you will blend example, advice, and insight from many sources into your own way of working.

***Can you endure the discomfort of learning?***

Learning can be painful. You try and fall short, learn from the experience, and then try again and again until you become proficient. It's painful because no one likes the feeling of incompetence those early efforts produce. Think about delegating. Your first efforts are likely to make you feel uneasy and may even produce poor results. It's easier, less discomfoting, you may think, just to fall back on doing the task yourself.

So you're caught in a dilemma. You can keep doing well what you're comfortable doing (do it yourself), even though it won't produce the results you want. Or you can do something new (delegate) that will eventually produce the results you want even though you do it poorly at first and it makes you uncomfortable. That's a difficult trade-off. Can you endure the feelings of incompetence and frustration generated by doing something not well initially, even if it's the right thing to do? You have to if you're to make any progress. Be patient.

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To get past this hurdle, you will need emotional support, as well as feedback, guidance, and suggestions. This is one of the key roles your developmental network can play.

### ***Do you have mentors or other advisers?***

Much is made of finding a mentor at work—someone more senior who will give you wise counsel, protect you when necessary, open doors to opportunity, and generally act as your advocate.

Unfortunately, you cannot create or choose a true mentor. Such connections require some level of personal chemistry, develop slowly, and are difficult to maintain because they require effort and risk on both sides. A mentor who falls from grace can bring the protégé down, too, and a protégé who performs badly or somehow stumbles can damage the mentor.

Instead of seeking an ideal mentor, develop several relationships with those inside and outside the organization who can help you learn and develop yourself. (See “Employ a Personal Board of Directors,” later in this guide.) While you cannot force such things, you can make yourself available by behaving like the perfect protégé—someone who shares responsibility for the relationship by:

- Being eager to learn
- Making a genuine effort to apply what has been learned
- Being open to honest, even tough, feedback and advice
- Using the mentor’s time and resources wisely

- Fulfilling requests made by the mentor
- Always acting in a way that reflects well on the mentor
- Minimizing any risks to the mentor
- Treating the relationship and what is said and done in it confidentially
- Being appreciative of help received
- Above all, making the mentor look good—usually by performing well and giving the mentor credit

***Do you seek out new developmental experiences?***

Besides learning from the events of your normal work-day, you can actively seek out learning situations. This may mean you take on stretch assignments in your current work that broaden your experience, help you develop new ways of thinking and acting, and prepare you for advancement.

You needn't wait for such opportunities to appear. If you know where and how you need to develop, if you take a strategic, far-reaching view of your journey, you can propose or create opportunities and assignments. This approach works best when you combine your needs and goals with those of your organization so that your growth contributes to corporate objectives.

Create a self-reinforcing cycle of success by using your strengths to land or create growth assignments, which you then use to develop new strengths, which lead to

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more and more challenging growth assignments. In this way, your track record and reputation will grow, you'll acquire more influence and responsibility, your network will become wider and more influential, and your role in it will become more prominent—all of which will lead to even more opportunities for growth, advancement, and progress on your journey.

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## Chapter 7

# Employ a Personal Board of Directors

by **Priscilla Claman**

Like avocado-colored appliances, traditional mentoring is something you don't see much anymore. Yes, corporate-sponsored mentoring programs will always improve personal exposure and connections. But the career strategy of hitching your future to some rising manager is outdated.

That's partly because midlevel and senior managers are no longer the ones with stable jobs. Many organizations are dealing with restructuring, downsizing, acquisitions, mergers, and, of course, recessions—so your mentor is just as likely to move on or be laid off as you are. And if you are considered her special protégé, you may lose your job when she does.

Another reason one mentor alone won't cut it is that no single person can possibly give you all the guidance

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Adapted from content posted on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org) on [October 20, 2010](#)

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**WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ON HBR.ORG**

Seeking diversity of thought is key. Loading the board with people who think like you do will not shed light on those “blind spots” that are career derailers. If, for example, you are a highly intuitive, “big picture” person, consider adding some “details” people to the board (your opposite number from a Myers-Briggs perspective). If you are a risk avoider, ask yourself if you know any successful risk takers that you might add to the board. If you work in a company, have at least one member of your board be a current or former employee—someone who knows the context of your work environment. —Posted by Mal Watlington

For the past 22 years, I’ve been meeting once a month with three fellow professionals in fields allied to mine to compare notes about our work and personal lives as well as the local business, political, and sports environment. We’ve gotten to know one another’s families firsthand and business associates secondhand as we have referred business opportunities back and forth and shared timely, objective advice on significant decisions in our lives. —Posted by Brad Howe

It’s difficult to put together a personal board that is committed. I’ve succeeded in doing so only on a temporary basis—during a major career transition, for example, or during a leadership crisis at work. One way executives can build this type of board is to join peer advisory groups that meet regularly, such as Vistage

and the Alternative Board. I've been a member of a Vistage group for more than nine years, and it has revolutionized my leadership and learning. It has been more significant for me than any schooling or seminars because it provides an environment of continual learning and accountability. —Posted by Kent Wilson

Some of my most successful clients have been [relying on a personal board] for years. I am on at least four that I know of. One of my clients, now director of people for a major European airline, has kept some of his old mentors from earlier businesses on his board. He had the benefit of their mentoring when he worked with them, but they've also seen him develop over time, so he gets the benefit of their increased commitment as well. —Posted by Lorraine

and nurturing you'll need to reach your potential. Even the wisest, most insightful people have blind spots, and even the most loyal and committed mentors can offer you only so much of their energy and time.

What you need instead is a board of directors for your career, a group of people you consult regularly to get advice and feedback on matters ranging from job performance to career advancement to personal enrichment. There's no need to hold meetings or even inform each person of his or her status as a board member—but you do need to select the right people, stay in touch, and reciprocate their generosity.

**Just like any good board, the people you choose should make different contributions to your thinking about how to reach your professional and personal goals.** You might want to include your boss or a colleague you admire—or both. If you are a senior manager, consider job search professionals, academics, and consultants with expertise in your specialty. The people on your board should know more than you about something, be better than you at something, or offer different points of view. Putting only buddies on your board won't help you grow and develop.

Worried that assembling your board will take too much time away from your work? It's actually not all that time-consuming—and your board will help you do your job better and more efficiently, especially if you've been placed in a role before you're fully equipped to handle it. The key is to match up your weaknesses with others' strengths—and, so you can give as well as get, your strengths with their weaknesses.

For example, I often go to my friend Ted, an expert in the world of finance, with questions like “What do the Basel Accords really mean?” and “Why did my corporate client's stock shoot up?” (Names in this article have been changed.) He is full of statistical information, but when he is looking for some up-to-date hunches, like what I think is going on in the job market, he calls me.

I get in touch with Kerry, a former colleague of mine who has a gift for delivering bad news, when I have something particularly difficult to communicate. For instance, Kerry helped me come up with an effective way to tell an upset client why I thought his employer

wasn't giving him the promotion he thought he deserved. Kerry turns to me when he has a hard job to fill and wants some leads.

Pat, a longtime client of mine, goes to all the conferences in our field, and she always knows the latest theories and research, so I check in with her periodically to find out what's new. She introduced me to concepts in emotional intelligence and neuroscience long before they became trends. And because she knows I enjoy batting around training ideas, she asks me for suggestions when she's looking for a creative new training exercise.

I have learned from each of these folks. They know I think highly of their advice, and I do what I can to help them in return.

**Mentoring from a personal board is also invaluable if you're making a career transition.** Ellen, another client of mine, took six years off from a demanding technology career to raise her children. When she was ready to return to work full time, she looked for advice on how to make the transition. She sought out a former colleague, and he was candid: Her technical skills just weren't up-to-date. With his assistance, Ellen identified the new software she needed to know and took a training class. When she asked for extra help in the class, the instructor found her a software coach, and the coach got her connected with a user group. Then, the user group connected her with a headhunter, who told her he could find her a job if she were certified in the software. While working toward the certification, Ellen regularly stays in touch with her former colleague, the instructor, her soft-

### How to Network Effectively

ware coach, and the headhunter to make sure she is on track.

No single mentor could have made the contributions to Ellen's career that all these individuals did. Finding and tapping her personal board members required some elbow grease, but it paid off.

Go forth and consult your own network. Instead of relying on a single upper-level manager, assemble a team of specialists for yourself as if you were creating a company's board of directors. Their combined efforts could yield real results for you.

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## Chapter 8

# Pitch Yourself in 30 Seconds—and Strengthen Your Career Network

by Jodi Glickman

Your elevator pitch is your 30-second spiel about who you are, what you can bring to an organization, and how you're different from others. It's what makes you memorable. Get this right as you build and maintain your network, and you'll be the first one people call when they have an open board seat, interesting project, or job listing that aligns with the skills and passions you've summed up so succinctly and compellingly.

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Adapted from "[3 Ways to Pitch Yourself in 30 Seconds](#)," posted on October 8, 2009 on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org)

## How to Network Effectively

Before you craft your pitch, consider:

1. **Why** it makes sense to connect or work with you.
2. **How** you're uniquely qualified for the work you do or the opportunities you're seeking.
3. **What** links past and current experiences—what's the glue that holds your story together?

As you answer the why, how, and what:

1. **Think relevant, not recent.** There's no rule that says you must talk about your résumé in reverse chronological order. Suppose an executive—let's call him Mike—is trying to get back into marketing after spending two years in a sales position abroad. If he keeps introducing himself as someone making a career switch *from* sales, he'll undercut his marketing experience. Instead, he should lead with the fact that he's a seasoned marketing professional: He took a detour, but he's moving back to where he belongs—putting his marketing prowess to work and thinking about what drives consumer spending habits.
2. **Focus on skills, not just your résumé.** You don't need to have a background in something to be good at it. Take Alex (not her real name), for example—a chemist and researcher who'd returned to school to get her MBA. She wanted to work in corporate finance for a large pharmaceutical company but was afraid no one would take her seriously given her credentials. When I asked Alex why she chose finance, she explained,

“That’s the way my brain works.” Her thinking was methodical and mathematical—which made her a natural fit for a corporate finance department. So instead of focusing on her time in academia, Alex emphasized to colleagues and clients that she was a numbers person at her core.

- 3. Connect the dots.** Whether you’re a chemist turned finance professional or a marketing executive with experience in international sales, find a way to bring your diverse experiences together and show how each one complements the other. I had to do this, too, when I shifted gears in my own career. As a former Peace Corps volunteer, I needed to clear a significant hurdle with clients when I became an investment banker. But I also had a background in finance, and I made the case that banking perfectly combined my strengths and training: I liked looking at clients’ challenges and issues from 30,000 feet and then digging into the details to come up with creative financing solutions. Whether the client was the mayor of my Peace Corps town in Chile or the CEO of a health care company, I could start at a high level and drill down quickly and effectively.

Here are sample pitches for all three situations:

Mike:

*I’m a marketing executive. Because of my lifelong fascination with what drives consumer spending, I’m looking for a position in the retail industry. I recently took a two-year sabbatical in a sales role abroad,*

## How to Network Effectively

*which gave me some great international experience, but I belong in marketing, and I'm excited to be headed in that direction again.*

Alex:

*I'm really looking forward to combining my passions for finance and science, and learning about the pharmaceutical industry. I come from academia, but corporate finance is a great fit for me—my mind is wired for math, and I'm highly methodical.*

Jodi:

*I'm not your typical investment banker—I actually spent five years in the public sector as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Latin America and as a policy analyst at the EPA. But I'm a big-picture thinker by nature and a numbers person by training, so you're in good hands—banking is pretty much a perfect combination of the two.*

Pitches like these pay off. Alex's, for instance, helped get her the pharma job she wanted. And mine helped me win clients' trust when I moved to investment banking. So carefully craft your own pitch—and create more opportunities for yourself.

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Jodi Glickman is the author of *Great on the Job* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2011) and the founder of a communication-training firm by the same name. Follow her on Twitter: [@greatonthejob](https://twitter.com/greatonthejob).

## Chapter 9

# Online Networking Never Rests

by **Dorie Clark**

Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter are no longer just for personal communication. They help you cultivate your professional brand, whether you're an expert on organizational behavior or a crackerjack consultant. So the way you use these sites has a big impact on what career opportunities come your way.

It's not enough to tread carefully online—keeping the language and photos clean—when you're seeking a promotion or a job. Think of your social media behavior as a permanent career campaign, for these reasons:

### ***Your reputation precedes you***

Any potential partner or employer with a modicum of common sense is going to vet you on the internet before

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Adapted from "[It's Not a Job Search, It's a Permanent Campaign](#)," posted on March 28, 2012 on [hbr.org](#)

## How to Network Effectively

even bothering to talk to you. In a world where some job seekers make up part (or all) of their résumés, the internet provides valuable third-party verification that you are who you say you are. If, for instance, you claim you were the company spokesperson at your last job, a quick check of past press releases and news articles will confirm or disprove your story. Make it easier for the people doing the checking: Aggregate links to articles that mention you or pieces you've written (such as op-eds or blogs) on a personal website that will come up when anyone searches for information about you. If you're practically invisible on the web, people may think you're a fraud. One firm I consulted for almost didn't hire a qualified senior executive because he had almost no online footprint—the hiring team assumed he must have fabricated his background. He hadn't, but the elaborate process of verifying his story nearly cost him the job.

### ***Your online behavior helps you establish cred***

If your online presence consists solely of eBay purchases and race times from your running club, you're doing nothing to show people what you have to offer professionally. Say you've spent the past few years developing new skills and capabilities, but your employer and colleagues are oblivious to them. Demonstrate your knowledge—not just to these folks, but to anyone who might want to hire you—by tweeting, blogging, and posting articles by you or others in your field. It shows people that you're engaged and that you think about your world of work even when you're not “on the clock.”

Monitor your online identity to learn how a hiring manager or a business partner might see you. Start by Googling yourself: Try a few different search engines, which may yield a variety of results. What picture of you emerges? If there's truly objectionable content, you can ask the person who put it up to remove it (or, more drastically, threaten legal action). But if, like most of us, you discover an assortment of random links, you'll want to create professionally focused content (such as a LinkedIn profile, blog, or Twitter account) to drive the least relevant material down in search results. Finally, you can set up free Google alerts on yourself and your current company to track media mentions. If an alert points you to a positive article about you, thanking the author may result in more content. (A colleague of mine e-mailed a writer who had mentioned her briefly in an article, and their correspondence led the writer to do an in-depth profile on my colleague's work.) If you discover a negative story, you can reach out to quickly correct the facts—or at least share your own talking points—through the communication channels you've developed (Twitter, blog posts, and so on).

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**Dorie Clark** is the author of the forthcoming book *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013). Follow her on Twitter: [@dorieclark](https://twitter.com/dorieclark).

# Chapter 10

# Smart Social Media Helps Jobs Find You

by **George Anders**

How does a customer service expert in Seattle catch the attention of a hot start-up in San Francisco, 700 miles away? Quite likely by networking and brand building on social media’s “fun” sites—even the ones best known for their tweets, pokes, and cat videos.

It’s been obvious since 2003, with the launch of LinkedIn, that social networking could help job candidates and employers interact. But more playful sites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Quora, and even Pinterest are also turning out to be valuable job-hunting tools. They’re the online equivalents to networking at beach resorts or children’s soccer games.

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Adapted from content posted on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org) on [March 1, 2012](#)

People may go online to banter. No matter; before long, they talk shop.

Take Greg Meyer, who has helped run customer service operations for nearly a dozen companies. Last year, Meyer became an enthusiastic participant on Quora, a popular knowledge-sharing site. He joined discussions on everything from Batman to customer complaints. When others wondered about Twitter's value in customer service, Meyer's detailed answer became a Quora standout.

Meyer's customer service posts didn't say "hire me"—but they had that effect anyway. Executives at Assistly, a San Francisco maker of help-desk software, read his comments, liked them, and invited him to interview for a job. Within weeks, Meyer was hired. He now works full-time in Seattle for the Desk.com team at Salesforce.com, which acquired Assistly.

Such pathways to new jobs are most common in fields where job seekers and employers constantly hang out online. Computer programming, political campaigning, and social media itself are prime examples. But the list keeps growing. High-end restaurants are finding chefs, ad agencies are hiring researchers, and publishing houses are selecting authors through Twitter, Facebook, and so on.

How can sites like these help you network and establish expertise in your field? By making two key tactics easier and more powerful than ever:

1. **Building a better contact list.** Collecting business cards at conferences and mixers is arduous—and it's even harder to do without being

a pest. Twitter offers a better alternative, since lots of recruiters, hiring managers, and industry networkers are swapping job leads and industry updates there.

Alyssa Henry, a graduate student at Syracuse University's Information School, began her Twitter-upgrade strategy by following decision makers in her field. Then she published links to interesting articles and campus updates. Some of the people she followed started to reciprocate, following her tweets. That's how she built concentric circles, so even friends of friends of friends became aware of her work. Her payoff: a tweet from an ad agency manager with ties to a *Fortune* 100 company, urging people in his network to hire her.

**2. Showing your work portfolio more widely.** Ralph Paone, a champion college debater, hadn't considered seeking a career in advertising after graduation. But he didn't need to make the first move. Zach Canfield, a top hiring executive at the San Francisco ad agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, had a hunch that skilled debaters might make excellent market researchers. By browsing debaters' video clips online, Canfield identified Paone as a top prospect. A follow-up conversation led to a full-time job.

High-traffic sites such as YouTube and Pinterest can showcase great work in almost any field. Recruiters are increasingly prowling the web for the best candidates—even if it means poach-

ing them from their current jobs. It's often more efficient than posting public job ads that elicit hundreds of ill-suited responses. By displaying a strong internet portfolio of your work, you increase your chances of getting noticed and hired.

Recruiters can't talk to every candidate who might deserve a chance. Because it's so cumbersome to schedule phone screenings with every unusual suspect who applies, they don't typically do it. They're more inclined to scan chat boards, Twitter feeds, expert-answer sites, and Facebook pages for potential candidates with verve. It takes much less time.

So—like Meyer, Henry, and Paone—set up your social media presence with an eye to what browsing recruiters will want to know about you. Making a strong early impression online gives you an edge. It translates into more chances to win interviews with hiring managers.

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**George Anders** is the author of five business books, including the ebook *Becoming a Rare Find* (Portfolio, 2012).

# Chapter 11

# Wielding Digital Influence

by **Thomas H. Davenport and Bala Iyer**

Dharmesh Shah, the founder and chief technology officer of HubSpot, a web marketing company, has an impressive online network: He runs a 216,000-member LinkedIn group for entrepreneurs, hosts a Q&A community for start-ups on Stack Overflow, and has a healthy Twitter following. And Shah knows how to use that network. During a recent hiring push at HubSpot, he tweeted about the company's need for talented engineers and quickly received referrals for hundreds of candidates, several of whom he hired. On another occasion, while wrestling with an error-prone program for a new product, he asked his online followers for help. Within hours he received many suggestions, and one person provided instructions for debugging the program.

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Excerpted from "[Three Skills Every 21st-Century Manager Needs](#)," reprint R1201N, *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 2012

Most managers today understand how to use online tools to build and expand their networks. It's easy to reach out to industry contacts and colleagues through LinkedIn and Facebook, to follow and be followed on Twitter, and to actively participate in corporate social media initiatives. Less well understood is how managers can use these networks to gather information and wield influence in an increasingly interconnected, collaborative, and less-hierarchical workplace. Shah provides a perfect case study, offering lessons that will help even executives outside the technology industry.

To build an effective online network, you need to focus, as Shah does, on three things: reputation, specialization, and network position. As in the real world, reputation is currency—it's how you get people you've never met to seek you out, give you information, and collaborate with you. In the virtual world you build your reputation by offering interesting content, drawing attention to your web presence, and motivating others to circulate and act on your ideas. Reputation can be assessed using services such as Klout, Identified, PeerIndex, and Empire Avenue, which score you on the basis of how many people you influence, how much influence you wield, and how influential your contacts are. Shah has a Klout score of 80 (on a scale of 1 to 100).

He and other successful online operatives enhance their reputations and expand their networks by focusing on key areas of expertise. Shah's are technology and entrepreneurship—topics that are central to each of his web ventures. Yours might be sales or HR or nonprofit management. Take Barry MacQuarrie, an accountant

who set up a community on LinkedIn with the goal of understanding how social media could be used in his profession. It now has 1,800 users, who advise MacQuarrie on that subject. And prospective clients have found him and his firm through the group. Specialization involves demonstrating deep knowledge, establishing links with other experts both inside and outside your organization, committing to learn from them, and being willing to offer relevant information and referrals to others. Google+ and similar tools allow users to create “circles” or communities with shared interests; LinkedIn is fragmenting into specialist groups as well.

Although focus is important, the best online networkers also position themselves as bridges between otherwise unconnected groups. This can increase your influence, because it gives you a chance to identify potential collaborations or conflicts and to accumulate superior information. Shah, who graduated from the MIT Sloan Fellows Program, has access to MIT’s student and alumni networks as well as his start-up network. He can act as a broker between student ventures and VCs or between start-ups and talent, and can even find his own angel investment opportunities. LinkedIn Maps and TouchGraph enable users to visually examine their networks for connections, clusters, density, and redundancy.

Good networkers use their contacts as a source of quick feedback on—and even solutions to—work challenges of all sorts. We know a manager at an IT company who took advantage of internal social-networking technology to crowdsource reviews of a contractor he was considering. He discovered that the man had done

sloppy work on a few recent projects and so chose not to hire him. If your network is strong, you are connected to well-placed colleagues, suppliers, customers, and fellow executives in your field—a host of experts who can help you at a moment's notice.

Shah's debugging challenge is one example. Consider also Michelle Lavoie, an enterprise community manager at the IT services company EMC, who used her internal blog to tackle an even bigger problem: how to cut costs during the 2008 financial crisis. "Constructive Ideas to Save Money," her 430th post to the network, requested a moratorium on complaints about a controversial change in the vacation policy, offered five positive suggestions, and encouraged colleagues to contribute their own. A year and a half later the post had gotten more than 26,000 views and had generated 364 responses with cost-saving ideas, many of which were implemented. Lavoie gained visibility at every level of the company and ensured that getting EMC through the crisis was an all-hands initiative rather than a top-down edict.

You can also use your network to test proposals and strategies, inside and outside your organization. Float an idea and see how many "likes" it gets. Or direct certain groups of people to an online survey. The feedback might help you persuade a reluctant boss or client to come around to your point of view. These methods of exploiting strong virtual networks are only the beginning. Newer techniques, such as engaging your online contacts in work "games" so that they happily take action in your or your company's behalf, are now coming to the fore.

## Wielding Digital Influence

Soon, we expect, organizations will begin to seek out employees with demonstrably strong online connections and a track record of wielding influence through them. The best networkers will become even more highly valued.

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Section 3  
**Overcoming  
Networking  
Obstacles**

# Chapter 12

# Network More Efficiently

by Whitney Johnson

No question, networking can take a lot out of you. If you don't go about it efficiently, you'll run out of steam, with little to show for it. Here are two ways to get more mileage out of your efforts as you search for new contacts, reconnect with old ones, and try to maintain ongoing relationships—all while doing the *rest* of your work.

### ***Focus on multiplex ties***

When we know someone from more than one context, we have what's called a *multiplex tie*. Because such relationships are richer than those rooted in just one setting (the office, for example), they come with a higher level of trust—and so we tap them more frequently. We're much more likely to network with colleagues whose children

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Adapted from "[Building a Network That Works Takes Work](#)," posted on April 15, 2011 on hbr.org

## Overcoming Networking Obstacles

go to school with our kids, for instance, or people we've trained with for marathons. Plus, as research shows, these sorts of ties improve our chances of meeting our goals.

Examine your strongest professional relationships. In many of them, you'll find overlapping work, civic, religious, school, neighborhood, or childhood ties. Certainly that's true for me. Before I became a founding partner at Clay Christensen's investment firm, Rose Park Advisors, I'd worked on several volunteer projects with Clay over the years, such as the family history event we'd organized with Dr. James Cash at the Museum of African American History in Boston. Working together to plan and host the event reinforced our civic ties and helped the three of us get to know one another in a new capacity. When Clay was looking for a seasoned investment professional to co-found Rose Park, he didn't conduct a nationwide search; he came straight to me. We'd already vetted each other. He knew my strengths—and I his.

These types of relationships can't be forced. So how do you develop them? Look for activities outside work that will draw on your passions and skills and put you in touch with people who care about the same things. If you're committed to mobilizing voters for an important election, for example, maybe you'll organize a team to help homebound seniors get to the polls or complete absentee ballots. You'll build multiplex ties by engaging with your fellow volunteers—and strengthen those ties by following through on your commitments and earning trust. Then, the next time you need help with a job- or career-related challenge, you'll have a wider pool of people who are willing and able to offer their assistance.

### ***Balance give-and-take***

You network to gain access to knowledge, influence, and resources. But what's the trade? Asking people to do things for you gratis will quickly deplete your social capital. (See "Asking for Favors" later in this guide.) So consider how you can add value to your multiplex ties. At last year's South By Southwest Interactive conference, for example, I saw someone I admire: Gretchen Rubin, the author of *The Happiness Project*. When I walked up and introduced myself, I said, "I know you. I follow you on Twitter, and you just started following me." That helped me establish balance from the get-go. And as we chatted, I realized I could introduce her to someone she wanted to know as much as I wanted to know her—and she was glad for the offer. Time will tell whether we'll do much connecting beyond that debut interaction, but starting things off with a quid pro quo raises the odds.

Reciprocity is especially important for maintaining multiplex ties. You may be tempted to let it slide because people know you're "good for it." But when you seek and receive help, always find out what you can do for the giver, no matter how asymmetrical the relationship seems. Say you want an introduction to the head of strategic partnerships at a large company, and you know someone who knows the right person. Figure out what your contact wants or needs. Your expertise? Your social media platform? Even in very asymmetric instances, you'll have something to offer—something as simple as an Amazon review of her book will be appreciated.

What if someone reaches out to you but doesn't have anything *you* need? Look for a way to make it an ex-

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change. A request, even a small one, keeps the relationship reciprocal. When recent grads come to me for advice, for example, I provide it free of charge, but I ask them to comment on my blog or retweet one of my tweets. It's a simple, concrete way they can return the favor—one that allows us to interact in another context and adds even more dimension to the relationship.

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**Whitney Johnson**, a leading thinker on driving innovation via personal disruption, is the cofounder of Clayton Christensen's investment firm Rose Park Advisors. She is the author of *Dare, Dream, Do: Remarkable Things Happen When You Dare to Dream* (Bibliomotion, 2012). Follow her on Twitter: [@johnsonwhitney](https://twitter.com/johnsonwhitney).

# Chapter 13

## Asking for Favors

by Jodi Glickman

We all rely on people in our networks for favors, whether we're asking for time and effort (“Can you cover for me on tomorrow’s conference call?”) or for social capital (“Would you introduce me to your contact at Nike?”). Trading favors helps sustain networking relationships by keeping them mutually beneficial.

But there’s an art to making the requests. Follow these steps, and you’ll increase your likelihood of getting what you need while building goodwill:

### 1. Set the Stage with Your Motive

By acknowledging up front that you’re asking for a favor—and offering to return the person’s generosity—you can reinforce the give-and-take nature of the relationship. So start by saying, “I have a favor to ask.” It engenders trust

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Adapted from [“Asking for a Favor: Three Keys”](#) and [“The Biggest Mistake People Make After Receiving a Favor,”](#) posted on January 12 and January 19, 2011 on hbr.org

because your motive is transparent. And it also gives your colleague or friend a heads-up—something everyone appreciates. Then you can clearly say what the favor is and provide a reason for it. As Robert Cialdini shows in his iconic book *Influence*, people react positively to the word “because.” We all like to know *why* we’re being asked to do something.

Suppose you’re asking a colleague to cover for you at a client dinner. Here are two very different approaches:

- “Anthony, can you please cover for me at the dinner tonight? I won’t be able to make it.”
- “Anthony, I have a favor to ask. Can you please cover for me at the dinner tonight? I can’t get away from the office. I’d be happy to cover for you at the one next week.”

In the first scenario, Anthony will probably be caught off guard—and he may bristle because the request sounds *expected* of him. But in the second scenario, you show consideration by giving him a moment to prepare for the request, explaining why you hope he can help (rather than taking for granted that he’ll comply) and offering to return the favor.

## 2. Provide an Escape Clause

Always give people the opportunity to easily and graciously decline. This makes them want to help you if they can.

After you make your request, say something like:

- “If you can’t help out, I completely understand, but I thought I’d ask.”

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- “I know it’s a busy week for everyone, so I realize you may not be able to make it, but I wanted to include you.”
- “I’d love an introduction to Katherine, but if for any reason you don’t feel comfortable passing along her information, that’s OK. I don’t want to create an uncomfortable situation for you.”

### 3. Close the Loop

Don’t leave someone wondering about the outcome after helping you out. It’s rude, and it can create negative consequences: People may think you’re unreliable or regret spending energy on your request. If you don’t tell me how things went after I introduced you to a client, for example, or whether you got into an exec-ed program after I put in a good word for you, I’ll think twice about doing you another favor.

Follow up and share what happened, good news or bad. For example:

- “Thanks so much for putting me in touch with Stephanie. She and I spoke last week, and she was extremely helpful. I know how busy she is, so I very much appreciate your going out on a limb for me. We’ve made plans to have coffee when I get to LA next month—I’ll let you know how it goes.”
- “Thanks again for putting me in touch with Stephanie. Unfortunately, we keep running into scheduling conflicts and haven’t been able to meet

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yet. But I appreciate the opportunity—and I'll let you know if we do manage to connect.”

By giving an update and once more expressing your gratitude, you make it clear how valuable the favor was. The person who granted it can see that her time and effort *meant* something to you—and that strengthens the relationship.

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**Jodi Glickman** is the author of *Great on the Job* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2011) and the founder of a communication-training firm by the same name. Follow her on Twitter: [@greatonthejob](https://twitter.com/greatonthejob).

## Chapter 14

# Being an Effective Gatekeeper in Your Network

by Jodi Glickman

When people request introductions to others, of course you want to help them out—that’s how networks *work*, after all. But you also need to protect your relationships by looking out for your contacts’ best interests. If both parties will get something out of an introduction, it’s a no-brainer: You put them in touch with each other. If only one of them stands to benefit, however, your decision requires more thought. You’re asking a colleague or friend to make the time to “let in” someone new. So consider whether the request is reasonable and whether it’s worth spending your social capital on the favor. As long

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Adapted from “[Be an Effective Gatekeeper \(or, How to Keep Out the Riff-Raff\)](#)” and “[How to Say No to Making an Introduction](#),” posted on November 9 and November 17, 2010 on [hbr.org](#)

as the answer to both questions is yes, it makes sense to proceed. Here are some guidelines:

## **Making the Introduction**

The easiest—and most common—way to introduce people these days is by e-mail. To do it effectively, try following these rules of thumb:

1. **Be upfront about who benefits:** People on the receiving end of your introductions will take them more seriously if you always state immediately why you're making the connection. Whom will it help—and how? Do you think both parties will like each other and want to work together? What shared interests or goals will the introduction serve? Be specific about motives—and don't make it seem as though there's a two-way benefit if it's really one-directional.
2. **Don't copy "all" on the e-mail.** Unless you're 100% sure the recipient will be open to the introduction, don't copy the third party—that makes it harder for your contact to say no. Instead, when you send your e-mail explaining why you'd like to make the introduction, include the other person's contact information so the recipient can follow up directly if he chooses to do so. Then let the "asker" know you've made the request for her, and say you'll keep her posted. And ask to be notified if she hears first.

3. **Give the recipient an “out.”** I always give people the chance to say no to whatever favor I’m requesting, no questions asked. (See “Asking for Favors,” earlier in this guide.) It’s the generous and polite thing to do. And if they don’t feel pressured into saying yes, they’re more likely to do what they can to help.

Here’s a sample e-mail introduction that shows these principles at work:

*Stephanie,*

*Hello, and I hope you’re doing well. I’m writing to introduce you to Robyn, a former colleague of mine. Robyn is designing a product for high-net-worth individuals that may be of interest to you and your clients. She’s hoping to speak with some people in the industry with knowledge of that client base, and I thought you’d have an interesting perspective on the most useful and compelling forms this product might take.*

*If you don’t have the time or inclination, I completely understand, and I will politely decline for you. I have not copied her on this e-mail for that very reason. But if you’re able to connect, I think you two would have a great conversation. Robyn’s bio and contact details are below, in case you’d like to reach out to her.*

*I look forward to hearing from you soon.*

*Best,  
Jodi*

The opening paragraph gives a reason for the introduction: It makes clear that Robyn is the one who will gain the most but also mentions that the product might interest Stephanie. And it doesn't apply any pressure—it leaves the door wide open for Stephanie to connect with Robyn or say no, as she sees fit.

### **Declining the Request**

If you can't vouch for someone's qualifications or don't feel confident that the introduction makes sense, you owe it to all parties not to move forward. Wasting other people's time is never a good idea: It makes you look bad, even if your intentions were good.

Last year my acquaintance Robert (not his real name)—a Manhattan psychologist working on a self-help book—asked me for an introduction to my literary agent. So I had him e-mail me an overview of his project.

Unfortunately, Robert's e-mail was vague, lazy, and unimpressive. He didn't sell himself or his proposed project in any compelling way.

I was in a quandary. Though I didn't want to recommend Robert to my agent, I also didn't want to be dismissive or impolite. I had several choices. "Forgetting to respond" would have been disingenuous and extremely rude. Simply telling Robert that my agent was no longer accepting introductions would certainly have let me off the hook—but I didn't want to lie, and it wouldn't have helped Robert in the long run. The kindest thing to do was to decline his request—and tell him why.

It's never easy to say no to someone like Robert, but these tips will help:

1. **Be honest.** Tell the person why you're declining his request. In my situation, I politely explained to Robert that he wasn't ready to connect with *any* literary agent because his proposal wasn't fully baked. If I introduced him to mine, a rejection would surely follow.
2. **Provide a consolation prize.** If you don't feel comfortable making a connection, the next best thing is to offer guidance on what the person should do differently next time to make sure the introduction happens. My consolation prize to Robert: a sample e-mail that I'd sent to prospective literary agents. I'd worked long and hard on that message: It included a detailed overview of my project, my target audience, my competitive advantage, and a media and marketing strategy. Given that the e-mail had landed me an excellent agent, I thought Robert would find it valuable as a template.

Robert immediately thanked me for sharing it and acknowledged that he had a long road ahead before he'd be ready to reach out to agents. So he was *grateful* that I'd said no to his request—and sending him the sample e-mail didn't cost me any time or energy.

Other consolation prizes might include referrals to others who can lend a hand (such as an editor or ghost writer for Robert) or an offer to

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help brainstorm (“I’m sorry I can’t put you in touch with Susan, but I’m happy to spend some time thinking through next steps with you”).

3. **Stay in touch.** If you value the relationship, you need to maintain it. After declining Robert’s request, I said I’d be happy to revisit the issue once he’d fleshed out his proposal. So he could feel comfortable approaching me again—whether about this or something else entirely. And, just as important, I could turn to him with a request of my own.

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**Jodi Glickman** is the author of *Great on the Job* (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2011) and the founder of a communication-training firm by the same name. Follow her on Twitter: [@greatonthejob](https://twitter.com/greatonthejob).

## Chapter 15

# Connect at Conferences— Without Feeling Awkward

by Peter Bregman

At conferences, I'm usually reluctant to walk up to strangers and introduce myself. So I roam, self-conscious, seltzer water in hand. But when I arrived in Austin, Texas, for South By Southwest—the music, film, and interactive conference—I was excited. I was speaking on a panel, and because everyone told me SXSW is a blast, I'd given myself an extra day to check it out.

But it didn't play out as I'd hoped. I gave my talk, did a signing for my book, *18 Minutes*, and then—well, I was at a conference. I went to a party and just stood there.

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Adapted from "[How to Attend a Conference as Yourself](#)," posted on March 26, 2012 on [hbr.org](#)

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I was tempted to leave but thought, why not take this opportunity to explore an uncomfortable emotion? So I pondered what “awkward” felt like.

It felt awkward. After more reflection, I recognized why: Once I’d finished the panel, I had no clear role or purpose. I was having a conference-generated identity crisis. I’m a writer, speaker, consultant, father, and husband. But who am I when I’m not actively writing, speaking, and so on? Who am I without my accomplishments?

Once I understood the source of my discomfort, I resisted the urge to break the ice by dropping names or telling people I’d written a book. Instead, I simply introduced myself by name, without trying to create a “conference persona.” That put me more at ease—which I think made me more approachable.

A woman walked over and introduced herself. Then she waved a colleague over. They weren’t looking for anything from me, nor I from them. We just talked about a recent speaker we’d all heard and what we thought of Austin. As soon as we parted ways, a man came over. He and I chatted about, of all things, the discomfort of standing around not knowing people at conferences. Suddenly I was having real conversations about real things. I felt camaraderie with the people around me. I felt good.

This new approach took some getting used to, but it made perfect sense: Of course it’s a mistake to launch into “sales” mode when you meet someone new—even at a conference where the point is to peddle your ideas. People will invest time in getting to know and trust you first; then they’ll decide whether they care about what you have to say.

How do you engage in conversations at a conference without trotting out your résumé? Here are some tactics to try next time you're feeling naked beneath your name badge:

### ***Get personal***

Ask people open-ended questions about themselves: Where are they from? What do they like to do? What do they find interesting about the conference so far? What brought them to it? Ask about the region you're in (suppose the conference is in Aspen—do they like the mountains? do they ski or mountain bike?).

Consider what you'd talk about with someone you know well, and try speaking that way with the people you meet. For example, tell them you're feeling awkward if you are. Often they feel the same way. Sure, at first it might seem like over-sharing. But there's a decent chance it'll open up a conversation that's mutually interesting.

### ***Approach a crowd***

Many of us are intimidated by groups and hesitate to approach them, but that's a mistake. Big circles often form out of familiarity and comfort—people tend to stick with folks they already know. Step in and introduce yourself, or sidle up and listen to the conversation until someone draws you in. This isn't high school. You're not trying to break into an exclusive clique. Ultimately, other conference goers want to branch out, too. A fresh face and voice will be welcome.

By making real connections with people, you'll have a better shot at establishing relationships that have stay-

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ing power. You can reach out later when you need help thinking through a business plan, brainstorming for funding sources, or pulling off a big project. And that's much more useful than leaving the conference with a swag bag full of business cards you'll never refer to again.

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**Peter Bregman** is a strategic adviser to CEOs and their leadership teams. His latest book is *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done* (Business Plus, 2001). Follow him on Twitter: [@peterbregman](https://twitter.com/peterbregman).

# Chapter 16

## How to Reach Out After Losing Touch

by Jodi Glickman

What's worse than having the perfect person in your network to ask about a job opportunity, a career switch, or an impending move to Asia—and feeling guilty about doing so because you've lost touch?

It can be a little embarrassing to pop up suddenly with a request if you haven't seen or spoken with the person in ages. But you can and should reconnect with valuable contacts, even if months or years have passed. Here are three ways to make that potentially awkward exchange less painful:

### 1. Acknowledge the Lapse in Time

Glossing over a lapse in communication is akin to ignoring the elephant in the room. You both know it's there.

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Adapted from content posted on [December 9, 2010](#) on [hbr.org](#)

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So acknowledge it—and give it some rationale or context. Have you been working or traveling abroad? Did you leave your profession to try something new? Did you pause your career to start a family? Or have you just been incredibly busy at work? Whatever the reason, get it out there when you call or e-mail so you can move past it. For instance:

- “Patricia, how are you? I’m sure you’re surprised to hear from me—the last time we spoke I was headed off to graduate school. I wound up moving to Washington, DC, shortly thereafter, where I’ve been for the past five years.”
- “Sean, I hope you’re well! I’m so sorry I haven’t been in touch. You’ve been on my mind for months, and I’ve just been consumed by a crazy work schedule.”

## 2. Explain “Why Now?”

There are a few basic reasons why you’d need or want to reach out to someone after losing touch: You have an agenda to pursue, you want to reestablish the relationship so this contact will be willing to help when you *do* have an agenda, or you owe her something that you haven’t yet delivered.

In any of the above cases, it’s important to think about why you’re getting in touch now, after all this time, and be transparent about your motive. The “why now” explanation should mention the event that prompted you to get in touch and include your agenda, if you have one. Following are two examples.

- “I’m going to Asia next month to work in GE’s plastics division. Last I heard, you were working in Tokyo. I’d love to pick your brain on how to adapt to the culture before heading abroad.”
- “After my daughter started school this fall, I came back to the firm—and I’m thrilled to be working with the consumer retail sector again. Do you have time in the next few weeks to meet for coffee and catch up? I’d love to hear your perspective on how the industry has changed.”

### **3. Offer a Quid Pro Quo**

Finally, be as gracious and generous as you’re hoping your contact will be. You’re much more likely to get a positive response if you think about a two-way benefit, not just how you can take advantage of the other person’s expertise or connections. A few examples:

- “May I introduce you to Jim? I think you’d really enjoy speaking with him about his experiences at the Dreamforce conference.”
- “Hi, Mary. Thanks again for your help with my business plan. I’m sending you a book about successful start-ups that I just finished and thought you would enjoy.”

I’ve seen those kinds of tactics help people restore connections that have fallen by the wayside—and I’ve found them useful in maintaining my own network. For example, a few years ago I ran into an old classmate from Cornell who had become the entrepreneur in residence

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at the Johnson Graduate School of Management. When I told him about my business, he generously invited me to give him a call for some over-the-shoulder advice. Sadly, I let the ball drop. When I finally reached out, it was a year later. Nonetheless, I got up the nerve to contact him.

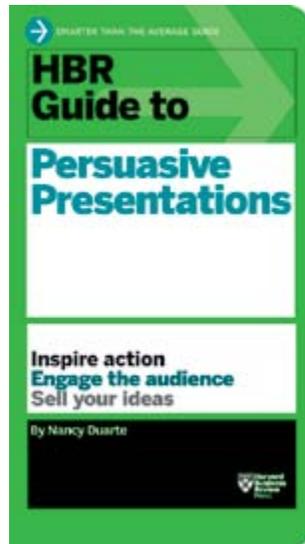
After explaining that I'd been busy with a new baby and trying to juggle family and career, I said I could use his perspective on how to scale my business, as it had expanded greatly over the previous year. I added that I'd love to return the favor someday, perhaps by introducing him to someone in my network or writing a LinkedIn recommendation for him.

Even though he had moved on from his role at the Johnson School, Sean was extremely generous with his time and knowledge. We reestablished a relationship that should prove useful (and fun) to both of us for years to come.

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Jodi Glickman is the author of *Great on the Job* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2011) and the founder of a communication-training firm by the same name. Follow her on Twitter: [@greatonthejob](https://twitter.com/greatonthejob).

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